2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

which divide the villages. I have therefore presented the current political and religious issues in Malta as concisely as possible, and have made no attempt to evaluate or to pass judgement on the policies of State, Church or political party. Consequently, any attempt to put the facts contained herein to polemical use is likely to distort them.

Though I lived in Malta during 1957 and 1958, this study is based on the research I carried out there from July 1960 to September 1961 under a grant from the Colonial Social Science Research Council, to whom I am most grateful. The terms of reference on which the research was based, and the form this final report has assumed, were dictated solely by my personal interests; my work was neither carried out on behalf of, nor a report to, a government.

My wife and daughters were with me during the entire period of fieldwork, and their encouragement and interest as well as the many friends they made were a great asset. We spent our first five months in Farrug and the last eight months in Kortin. These are not the real names of the villages, for the inhabitants of neither seek recognition. Indeed, throughout this study I have been at pains to avoid any indiscretion which would repay most shamefully our special debt of gratitude to friends and neighbours for their hospitality and good humour in the face of our ignorance of their customs. For the same reason, the names of many of the persons and saints who figure in this account have been altered.

I chose to work in Farrug because it is one of the villages divided by competing band clubs, and among other things I was particularly interested in the part this unusual rivalry plays in village politics. With a population of approximately 1,400, it is one of the smaller Maltese villages. We later moved to Kortin, a village of almost 5,000, since its size and the fact that it is not divided by band club rivalry provided an interesting contrast to Farrug. Available housing determined the choice of these particular two villages from among the many that would have met my requirements. Besides detailed research in these villages, I carried out comparative studies into the general organization, leadership and patterns of conflict of 12 other communities. In this work Mr. Edward Micallef was my very able research assistant for three months. I chose 11 of these villages by stratifying all villages in Malta and Gozo according to population and then drawing out a

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

578 665 795 The relations between the Labour Party and the Church continued to deteriorate after the resignation; finally, in 1961, they gave way to open hostility. Both sides abused each other in the course of the election campaign. On 9th April the Church placed Mintoff and many of the Labour leaders under an interdict for their disrespect to the Bishop. A little over a month later, the Bishops issued a circular condemning the Labour papers. These sanctions intensified the conflict. Finally, just six weeks before the election, the Church, through the Diocesan Joint Council of Catholic Lay Associations, launched a massive campaign to persuade the people to vote against the Labour Party. The campaign was successful: the parties which the Church supported defeated the Labour Party at the polls, and the Nationalist Party took office.

578 659 665 795 The reader will have noted the similarity between the course of the conflicts of Strickland and Mintoff with the Church. Both took place after relatively long (for Malta) periods of representative government. Both involved a series of rather petty disputes which became progressively more bitter and divided the country. Both culminated in the Church imposing sanctions which ultimately led to the electoral defeat of its opponents. In each case, approximately one-third of the population chose to face Church sanctions rather than abandon its political leaders. Most of the actual incidents which provoked the disputes were quite out of proportion to the conflict they created. To my mind, these incidents were symptomatic of the inherent conflict between an elected government and a Church which has long exercised great authority in both secular and religious spheres.

It is not my intention to make a detailed analysis here of the complex causes underlying the present conflict between the Malta Labour Party and the Church. At this point it is sufficient to know that the dispute exists. In later chapters I shall be concerned with tracing its effects on the social organization of the villages. In the course of this study, it will also become apparent that there are conflicts between secular and religious interests in the villages which are quite unrelated to national political issues.

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

621 move for religious feasts and family celebrations. Sometimes a
794 number of these farms are clustered around a chapel or small
795 church dependent upon the parish church. In time, these hamlets may disappear; historical sources cite many which have long since vanished.[1] On the other hand, a hamlet may grow to the point where its inhabitants can afford to build a larger church and in other ways successfully press their claim to become a separate parish. Most rural parishes in Malta and Gozo have come into
632 being in this way. Some towns have been divided into two or
794 more parishes for administrative reasons. In Malta, Qormi and
795 Valletta are each divided into two parishes, and Sliema into three.
● [578] Rabat in Gozo is currently being divided into two parishes. But because of fierce rivalry between the residents of the territories concerned, the exact boundary line is disputed and the territorial division will probably take another generation to complete.

79 The parish priest, who in all but the smallest parishes is assisted by a curate or more, is responsible to the Church for the care of
[609] the souls of all Catholics resident in his parish. Except where foreign service personnel live with their families – notably in Rabat, Naxxar, Mosta, St. Paul's Bay, Luqa and Birżebbuġa – all villagers are Catholic, and are thus the priest's parishioners. These parishioners also form part of the corporate body of the Church.

793 The clergy in Malta, as in all other Catholic countries, are divided into two main groups: the secular or diocesan clergy, and the regular clergy. Diocesan priests are trained in the Bishop's Seminary and are directly subject to the authority of the Bishop. A further distinction is made between those diocesan priests whose families or patrons have been able to provide them with a benefice – either property or cash deposited at the Curia bank – yielding a minimum of £10 annually, and those who have received their benefices from their Bishop. After the first five years the former, who are by far the most numerous, are free to serve where they wish. The latter always remain at the service of their Bishop. Most parishes are run by diocesan priests, and the clergy
[792] resident in the villages belong to this group. The friars and monks of the regular clergy are members of religious orders. They have been trained in the seminaries and houses of their particular orders.

[1] An interesting study of villages which have disappeared is given in M. Richardson, *Aspects of the Demography of Modern Malta* (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Durham, 1960), pp. 243 ff.

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

V

611 The Maltese have large families and reckon kin relationship equally through males and females. Each person is thus at the centre of a wide network of cognates and affines. All these rela-
602 tives do not have equal importance; a person normally makes a distinction between his immediate family (*qraba tal-familja*), his close relatives (*qraba ta' gewwa*) and his distant relatives (*qraba fil-bogħod*). A man's immediate family consists of his parents and his siblings and their fiancées, wives and children. This set of relatives normally sees each other at least once a week, and would be invited for a baptismal or betrothal celebration. The close relatives usually include grandparents, parents' siblings and their
[574] wives and children – his first cousins. These relatives all expect to be invited to a wedding, if not to a baptism. If they live in different villages they will also exchange visits during their annual festas. Distant relatives include the siblings of grandparents and great-grandparents and their descendants. A person normally has no formal contact with this set, but he recognizes his relationship to them if it is known to him.

Upon marriage, a person extends the range of his immediate family to include the corresponding set of his spouse. He may meet more frequently with his wife's immediate family than with his own, especially if they live equidistant from both sets (or in his wife's village).

It should be noted, however, that these sets of kin are not fixed or bounded groups; a person is relatively free to invite whom he wishes to any given ceremony. Physical as well as genealogical distance combines with sentiment to determine the actual relatives who are placed in these rough categories by an individual. Thus a person may be on closer terms with a second cousin who lives next door than with a first cousin living in another village.
● [578] Normally, however, certain relatives *expect* to be invited to particular ceremonies, and failure to do so leads to friction, or may be a reflection of an existing conflict. Thus, while a first cousin does not expect to be invited to a baptismal or betrothal party, he does expect an invitation to a wedding. A second cousin does not expect to be invited to either, although he often is. These sets of kin relations are thus flexible; long dormant links can be manipulated for special purposes, such as to arrange introductions to

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

[p.40]

CHAPTER IV

The Basis of Leadership

621 The Maltese word for leader, *mexxej*, is seldom heard, and then
[192] only in reference to the leader of a political party. I once asked a
[622] parish priest who were the leaders of the village. He laughed and
[551] replied that there weren't any, because his parishioners did not like leaders. With the exception of the professionals and *il-puliti* from the towns, all the inhabitants of a village usually call one another by their Christian names and in general look upon each other as equals. This egalitarian outlook is compounded of many factors, of which the most important are similar occupation, standard of living and values, the detailed knowledge of each other's personal lives that comes with residence in a face-to-face community, and
178 jealousy. Any person who attempts to lead or to try to start
578 something new – such as a village playground – is derided. His
621 true motive is seen as self aggrandizement and his enemies and envious neighbours are quick to point this out to others who may
[539] not have realized it. 'Envy follows the wise man like his shadow' (*L-għira titrot wara l-għaref bħal dellu mieghu*), goes the Maltese
[609] proverb. Professionals and outsiders, especially if they are from the town, are occasionally able to start something new. Their social distance from most of the community protects them from the full impact of the envy and gossip which moulds so much of village life.

554 But in spite of the absence of official lay leaders and the con-
621 servative pressure of envy and gossip, there are a number of
793 persons who have a greater say than others in the affairs of the community. They are able to do this by virtue of their social position, their occupation or office in one of the village associations or their influence with the parish priest. These persons, together with the parish priest, form the aggregate which can be
[192] said to run the affairs of the community. While there is no generic term for this aggregate, those who compose it are sometimes referred to as *il-kbarat*, 'the big ones', or more derogatively as

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

aware of their separateness, and realized that both incense and gunpowder were ingredients basic to the celebration of a festa.

The actual celebration of the feast can be divided into three parts: the Triduum or Novena – the three to nine days of spiritual preparation which precede the feast day – the eve of the feast, and the day of the feast. As the feast is usually celebrated on a Sunday so that more people can come, the Triduum days are Wednesday, Thursday and Friday. High Mass is offered on these days, and in the evenings outside priests often come to preach sermons on religious topics related to the life of the patron saint. They are also days of preparation during which the elaborate street decorations are hoisted into place. Throughout the day the village is psychologically conditioned to the festa by salvoes of aerial bombs which are often timed to coincide with the ringing of the Paternoster and the Angelus. On the last day of the Triduum, after the final sermon, the village band marches through the main streets. Often the band is preceded by a mass of dancing and shouting enthusiasts of both sexes, who wave coloured scarves, silver loving cups and other symbols of their loyalty to their band and their saint. In villages where there are competing band clubs, this demonstration often provokes fights between rival supporters. These skirmishes are usually sparked off by the bands of girls who hoarsely shout themselves into a frenzy proclaiming the virtues of their saint and the shortcomings of their rivals. There are no visitors during this part of the feast.

On Saturday, the eve of the feast, there is a High Mass and Te Deum to mark the end of the Triduum. This is usually followed by a barrage of aerial fireworks. The local band then often marches through the village, stopping at all the clubs for drinks. This march is usually quite gay but in some villages it degenerates into a drunken spree. During the day, outside priests are brought in specially for the festa to hear confessions in the church. In the late afternoon, visitors begin to arrive to watch the Translation, a ceremony during which the celebrant, usually the Bishop, takes a relic of the saint on a short procession outside the church. After the Translation, the various guest bands march through the village and then settle down to play selections from operas and works composed by Maltese bandmasters. The many relatives and friends of the bandsmen join the gaily dressed crowds who have been streaming in by bus and car or on foot.

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

contributions would be used for the general needs of the church. The festa committee was dismissed.

The following year he ran the festa himself. It was quite a success, although there was some grumbling that there was not the same spirit in the festa as before. But following the festa the year after that, the grumblers became more vocal and began to take action. Their main criticism was that without the committee to whip up enthusiasm for the festa, the village was becoming apathetic about its celebration. Moreover, with no committee there was no one to paint and care for the festa furnishings – which they considered to be the finest in Malta, if not the world – and they would soon be spoiled. Consequently, a few days after the festa, the ringleaders gathered in the football club and formed a committee with Sur Gorg, the president of the Social Club, as chairman. Sur Gorg,[1] a wealthy middle-aged bachelor, is the last descendant in the village of a family which has played a leading role in the community for almost a century. The committee was composed of members of the band club, the social club and the football club. Representatives then went to Dun Bert and told him that many people wished to have the old festa committee restored, with the power of raising funds. They also suggested that this committee should control the collection of threepence a week. Dun Bert replied that while he was not opposed in principle to the idea of such a committee, he would have to consider it. In any event, he could not approve of their financial proposals. When the spokesman told him that a committee was already in existence and working for the good of the village, he became somewhat alarmed. The following Sunday he defended his position before the village from the altar, citing relevant portions of Canon Law and describing the parish's financial situation.

Sur Gorg's group then distributed leaflets to each house asking for a vote of confidence. This divided the village into two factions, for there were many who would not consider going against the wishes of their spiritual shepherd, no matter what their views on the festa were. Dun Bert eventually agreed to the formation of a parish council, to comprise two representatives from

[1] The title *sur* (from *sinjur*, sir, gentleman) is a mark of respect bestowed by villagers upon all educated outsiders who have no other title. It also marks social distance. Very few persons are addressed this way by their fellow villagers. Sur Gorg, though born in Kortin, was addressed this way because of his high social status and university education.

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

each association, including the religious ones.[1] The committee forwarded the names of the representatives of its three constituent clubs to Dun Bert. After some time, when they had received no reply from him, they wrote to the Archbishop. Finally, some two months later, Dun Bert wrote back that he could not accept any member of a political party committee on the parish council. This was clearly aimed at the secretary of the band club, who was a very active member of the Labour Party committee, the only political committee in the village. He was not willing to step down, and the other members of the committee supported his decision. The rest of the village slowly lost interest in the matter. The parish priest thus had his way, and is still in full control of the feast.

Many are still bitter about the manner in which their request to take a more active part in the organization of their feast was suppressed, but most have accepted it. They miss not so much the old festa committee, the members of which most people criticized freely, as the feeling they had had of all working together for the greater glory of the village. The members of the old committee at least had the virtue of being from the village, and were as anxious as the next person to celebrate the biggest and best feast in Malta, or so I was often told. Although no one suggested that the parish priest is anything but scrupulously honest, they consider that as an outsider, he does not have the same keen interest in their feast, and in the reputation of the village. Others, less charitable, accuse him of being hungry for power and anxious to enrich himself with his fees as procurator of the festa. Many also spoke to me with regret of the passing of the annual fairs, which the parish priest has not attempted to run on his own. The fairs were exciting occasions on which young and old, rich and poor, competed against each other in games of chance and raffles to win back the rabbits and chickens which they had previously donated to the festa. They say they miss the sense of unity that the fairs brought them. 'In those days we knew each other better,' one priest remarked. 'With the fair some of the poetry of the village was destroyed.' Perhaps, without expressing it in quite this fashion, the organizers of the committee, in their own way, were also seeking this lost poetry.

[1] Such parish councils have from time to time been established in some of the larger villages and towns, but most of them came to threaten the authority of the parish priests, who therefore disbanded them.

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

IV

Even when a parish is not competing with another for some honour, the decoration of the parish church is a matter of great concern to the village. As we have already observed, a parish church is more than just a central place of worship; it is the centre of most of the social life of a village and the repository of its collective wealth. The building itself, with its gilded ceilings and silver altar fronts, its damask tapestries and embroidered vestments, its precious votive offerings and ornate statues, represents a fortune amassed over centuries from the savings and bequests of countless inhabitants. The parish church is thus the embodiment of village history, a showpiece which all, even the most anti-clerical Labour supporters, point out with great pride to strangers.

The custodian of the church is the parish priest, who is responsible for all alterations or improvements to it. He often delegates much of this work, especially the fund-raising, to a local priest, who then becomes procurator of the church. Many church procurators devote their lives to building and beautifying their churches, and every generation contributes thousands of pounds for its upkeep and embellishment. But regardless of who holds the procura of the church, the people regard it as their communal property, and all take an intense interest in its maintenance and decoration. Because of this proprietary interest, a difference of opinion over details of decoration, and especially over structural alterations to it, can divide a village into strongly opposed factions.

At the beginning of this century Kortin was divided on the question whether to enlarge the existing church or to build a new one. The stronger faction, which included the resident nobles and the wealthy merchants, wished to build a new church. Their leader was Sur Vincenz, the grandfather of Sur Gorg. A wealthy merchant was thought to be willing to help finance the scheme. This group was opposed by most of the village clergy, including the parish priest, on the ground that the cost of a new church was beyond the resources of the village. Moreover, a benefactor had already bequeathed £2,000 for enlarging the church. The leader of this faction was Dun Batist, the senior local priest in the village.

The dispute raged from about 1880, when the plans of the new church were drawn up, to about 1913. In 1898 a number of people

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

addressed a petition to the Archbishop requesting permission to build a new church. But a year and a half later he ruled in favour of a counter-petition, and gave permission to begin reconstructing the old church. Shortly after this a riot developed out of a meeting called to urge the parish priest to permit the building of a new church. During the commotion, the stone railing around the front of the church was damaged. Six days afterward forty-two people were arrested for disturbing the peace and taken off to prison. After three days the arrested men were released because of insufficient evidence. The court assessed the total damage to the church railing at twenty-two shillings. This incident aroused the village. A month later the new church faction decided to begin work without the permission of the Archbishop. Early the following Sunday, a huge crowd led by Sur Vinċenz asked the parish priest for permission to work on Sunday. When their request was refused, they set off for the site and began to work anyway. That afternoon, Sur Vinċenz hired a band to play for them, and the music attracted people from many surrounding villages. The following day Dun Batist and the parish priest laid the matter before the Archbishop.

All through the month of October 1901 the leaders of the new church faction went in delegations to argue their case before the Archbishop, who was on holiday in Marsalforn, Gozo. The local diarist, on whose account much of the above is based, notes cynically that the Bishop listened with great attention, as he was in debt to one of the leading members. Meanwhile, the parish priest had been able to mediate between the factions. Dun Batist and his followers agreed to stop their work on the old church provided their opponents reimbursed them for their expenses to date. This was arranged. Finally, in January 1902 the parish priest announced that the Archbishop had given his permission for the construction of the new church. That afternoon there was a great celebration in the village, with many fireworks and a guest band, again paid for by Sur Gorg's grandfather.

But the construction of the new church soon ran into trouble. Sur Vinċenz failed to raise the capital required. As Dun Batist had foreseen, the cost of this grandiose scheme was far more than the village could manage. After the foundations had been laid, the work gradually came to a halt. The village did not begin to rebuild the old church until the end of 1909, when the parish priest set out to raise the extra £2,000 required.

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

346 794 [875] set out to raise the extra £2,000 required. One of the fund-raisers at the time was young Manwel, the father of Dr. Farrugia, who had then just begun to teach in the village school. The reconstruction of the old church was finally completed in 1913.

794 578 Sur Vincenz gradually dropped out of village activities. Many people blamed him for the trouble in the community. In 1912 he refused to allow the organizers of the festa to anchor one of the major street decorations in its customary position against his house. This action created more hostility towards him, and shortly after the festa a bomb was thrown through his cellar window. During the next six weeks he and his close relatives received several threatening letters, and one night the front of his house was smeared with red paint. But the rivalry between the factions gradually died out, and today there is no trace of it left. The old [887] men of Kortin who now spend their days in the shade of the huge façade of the church, and their evenings on its cool steps, remember the struggle clearly, for they were all deeply involved in it. As they look back to the events of sixty years ago, they often remark with wry smiles that the village was then a very lively place.

346 578 794 This incident was exceptional because of the immense cost to the village in money and labour that the construction of the new church involved. Now that church-building is no longer in vogue, new works usually take the form of decorations, such as new paintings or candlesticks. These do not generally arouse strong feelings, since all additions to the beauty and wealth of the church are normally welcome. A wise priest, however, tries to ensure that there is general agreement about them. It sometimes happens that he forgets, or underestimates, the proprietary interest of his parishioners in their church. When this occurs, there is usually trouble.

346 578 793 794 Some years ago, the parish priest of Farrug proposed to regild the chancel. His parishioners welcomed the idea, and contributed generously. But when the work was finally completed and the scaffolding removed, his parishioners were shocked to find that he had placed his personal coat of arms high over the chancel. He was the first priest in the history of the parish to have put his coat of arms inside their church; moreover, he had done so without their consent. There was great indignation, but the arms remained there. A year later he was promoted to a larger parish, and left

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

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the village. People then began to ask the new parish priest to have the coat of arms removed. He quite understandably declined to do so.

One morning, less than two months after the old priest had left, the village was startled by the news that the irksome coat of arms had been removed in the dead of night by persons unknown. In its place gleamed the freshly painted arms of the village. The job, which had involved at least three men, one of whom must have worked on top of a 60-foot ladder, had been skilfully executed. To add insult to injury, the nocturnal painters had telephoned the former parish priest after finishing their work and announced that he would find something of great interest in the church next time he visited Farrug. The following morning he came to the village, saw what had happened to his coat of arms, and immediately reported the matter to the police. The police interviewed many people, but did not find the culprits. They are still looking for them. The village is quite pleased that the arms were removed, although some deplored the rather crude way in which it had been done.

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

[p.74]

CHAPTER VI
Festa Partiti

578 621 Village unity is an ideal, and all villages try to present a tightly united front to the outside world. In spite of this, all are divided internally by cleavages which cut across the community at various levels. Some of these divisions are only temporary, and disappear when the issues out of which they have arisen are resolved. Others, which may have arisen out of temporary issues, have for one reason or another become a permanent part of the social scene. But regardless of their origin or duration, these divisions are painfully real to the villagers. Persons made vulnerable through a network of personal relations are often forced to commit themselves to a particular division. In doing so, they become opposed to neighbours and kinsmen who are committed to the other side. [602] This is one of the characteristics of life in all small villages. It is particularly true of communities, such as those in Malta, in which the inhabitants are closely related through kinship and affinity.

192 578 621 [665] [794] The Maltese call these divisions *partiti* (sing., *partit*). The term thus corresponds not only to groups of the order which we in English would call 'parties', but also to those to which we would apply the term 'factions'. Political parties are called partiti, and so are rival groups such as the two in Kortin which competed over the rebuilding of the church. Partiti are said to have *pika* between them. *Pika* denotes relations of competition, ill-feeling, hostility. There is little about the word which suggests the good-natured competition that can exist between rival school football or cricket teams. On the contrary, if there is *pika* between two groups, a no-holds-barred competition is expected. Partiti are thus considered to be a bad thing. They disrupt the harmony of the community and make it more difficult to project the ideal image of village unity to the outside world.

575 578 621 794 796 The oldest permanent division that exists in the villages is between the supporters of rival band clubs. This division is related to the cult of saints. In the previous chapter it was noted that

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

besides the patron saint, parishes celebrate many other saints. The feasts of these secondary saints are normally not as lavish as the annual festa of the patron. But many villages celebrate two large festas: one for the titular saint of the parish, and the other for a secondary saint who has assumed almost equal social importance. Where this occurs, a village is divided into two partiti, each of which has its own band club and celebrates one of the saints. The partiti compete over almost every aspect of the festa, including the decoration of the streets, the adornment of the statue, the number of guest bands and, above all, the fireworks. Even the exact number of communicants, the size of candles and the quantity of light bulbs illuminating the façade of the church often become the subject of dispute. Farrug is divided by this type of rivalry. One partit is dedicated to St. Martin, the titular of the parish, the other to St. Roque.

The origins of these festa partiti, where they can be traced, are very much alike. Most of them came into existence sometime between 1850 and the turn of the century, and most arose out of disputes between persons concerned with the celebration of the titular festa and those interested in the cult of some lesser saint. The latter were usually members of the confraternity dedicated to that saint.[1] These factions in time became centred on separate social clubs, and eventually acquired brass bands. The clubs provided a permanent institutional basis for the rivalry. As time went on, the partiti became more violent in their disputes and in the pressure they put upon individuals to support them. Finally in 1935, the Church, long alarmed at the extremes to which the devotion to some saints had been carried in certain villages, took steps to eliminate the competition. It promulgated a series of regulations designed to reduce the scale on which secondary feasts could be celebrated. These stipulated that for secondary feasts there was to be no Translation of Holy Relics on the eve of the feast, that only the church and the area immediately adjacent to it could

[1] Cf. Rob. Mifsud Bonnici, *Ġrajja Tal-Mużika F'Malta u Għawdex* (Malta, Giov. Muscat, 1954), pp. 38 f. He suggests that these partiti developed out of a dispute between persons who wanted to play sacred music by the Maltese composer Vincenzo Bugeja (1806–60) and those who preferred that of his rival, Paolo Nani (1814–1904). As far as I could determine, however, the only partiti which arose directly out of this dispute are those in Żebbuġ. On the other hand, many rival partiti, once established, played the music of either Bugeja or Nani during their feasts. The former took a star as their symbol, the latter an eagle. Today partiti in many villages are still nicknamed either *tal-istilla* or *tal-ajkla* after this once-important division.

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

be illuminated and that only one band on the eve and one on the day of the feast would be allowed. Although they are now ignored, the regulations also placed limits upon the variety, quantity and duration of firework displays. Finally, they drew attention to the already existing regulations that church decorations and new works of art introduced for secondary feasts should be less costly and beautiful than those for titular feasts.[1]

Parish priests were expected to insist on the observance of these regulations, and they succeeded so well that some secondary feasts were reduced to minor celebrations. Moreover, the *pika* between the partiti in Żabbar and Qrendi was so violent that the secondary feasts there were suppressed completely.[2] This served as a stern warning to others.

II

The story of the origin and development of the festa partiti in Farrug is in many respects similar to the accounts which I collected about festa partiti in other villages. It might, therefore, be helpful to examine it in some detail. Before 1877 there were no festa partiti in the village; everyone co-operated in the celebration of the feast of St. Martin, the patron of the parish. By all accounts it was a humble one, and lasted only one day. This period is described as an idyllic time during which the village was happy and united. But in 1876 a new parish priest arrived, and after that the scene began to change. Dun Rokku, the new priest, not only had a strong personal devotion to the saint after whom he had been named, but he was also from a village where there was a strong secondary partit devoted to St. Roque. Within a year he established a confraternity dedicated to St. Roque in order to 'inject some more life into this rural parish', according to the president of the St. Roque Band Club. The first feast in honour of St. Roque was celebrated in October 1878 to mark the establishment of the confraternity. Although the new secondary feast was at first a simple affair, it and the titular feast grew during the next few years.

[1] Concilium Regionale Melitense (1935), *Decreta* (Malta, Empire Press, 1936), p. 91.

[2] In Żabbar the devotion to St. Michael, the secondary patron, died out almost completely, though the *pika* between the bands has persisted. But in Qrendi the devotion to Our Lady of Lourdes, the secondary patron, has continued as strong as ever. In 1958 the Archbishop reinstated the confraternity dedicated to her, which his predecessor suppressed in 1935, but the partit band is still not allowed to play for her feast.

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

few years. In 1880 the new confraternity dedicated an altar in the church to its patron, and by 1886 some persons were beginning to grumble about having to pay for another feast. There was a feeling of 'you collect for your feast, and we'll collect for ours.'

In 1888 an incident occurred which changed the course of the rivalry between the supporters of the two saints, which until then appears to have been rather mild. Dun Rokku, who was the procurator of the parish church, tried to increase the rent on some of the local property it owned. There was an outcry, and some persons went to the Bishop to complain that not only had Dun Rokku been diverting parish funds to buy new street decorations for the feast of St. Roque, but he was also raising rents to continue this work. The complaints resulted in an investigation, following which the procura of the church was taken from Dun Rokku and given to a prominent member of the village, who favoured St. Martin. This action, not surprisingly, infuriated Dun Rokku. From that day onward, so the accounts relate, he threw his full support openly behind the feast of St. Roque.

Some time after this, the partiti each formed their own social clubs. According to St. Martin supporters, their club grew out of a pre-existing band club, but that of their rivals was not established until after the First World War. They thus consider that they have seniority. St. Roque partisans, on the other hand, deny this seniority. They maintain that both clubs came into being out of the former club around the turn of the century. Consequently they have equal seniority. However, both clubs claim that the records crucial to the question of seniority were destroyed by enemy action during the last war. There is thus no documentary evidence for either claim, a fact which makes for deadlock whenever the issue of seniority is raised.

Dun Rokku was a strongminded priest, and he ruled the village for fifty-six years. When he finally died in 1932 at the age of 90, he was blind and deaf. During his many years in the parish he did much to beautify the church. Unfortunately, so people recount, he also introduced the hated partiti that divided the village. Through a variety of means at the disposal of a parish priest, he succeeded in wooing or coercing three-fourths of the village into his partit. There are many stories about the old man and the methods he used to recruit supporters. One is that he would make it difficult for people to marry unless they were, or became, members of the

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

578 621 79 Confraternity of St. Roque. Unfortunately, at this point, it is not possible to distinguish fact from myth. The tales are accepted as reality, and so help to formulate the attitude of St. Martin supporters toward their rivals. However, when the old priest died, it was discovered that most of the festal finery of the parish church had been purchased in the name of the Confraternity of St. Roque. St. Martin supporters were in the humiliating position of having to beg their rivals for the use of the church valuables in order to decorate the church for the feast of the parish patron. Moreover, while the old priest had controlled the celebration of St. Martin, he had allowed the lay leaders of the St. Roque partit a free hand in planning their feast.

578 621 665 At this time the St. Martin club was split over national politics, and a faction composed of Strickland supporters left and founded a new club. Though both clubs remained loyal to St. Martin, there was trouble between them. Older St. Roque partisans recount with amusement how a report to the police by the secretary of the parent club resulted in twenty members of the new club being arrested and fined for gambling. But the hostility between these two factions declined when Strickland made his peace with the Church, and in 1934 they reunited.

578 621 713 714 The burden of redressing the balance between the partiti fell upon the old priest's successor, and upon those who followed him. There were many incidents between these priests and the St. Roque partit, and on several occasions the former had to send for police protection. In spite of the 1935 regulations, the St. Roque partit retained its numerical superiority as well as the church decorations during the 'thirties. It was not until 1942 that a shrewd parish priest succeeded in bringing the silver altar front out of the St. Roque strongroom into that of the parish church, where it has remained ever since.

The rivalry between the partiti lay dormant during the Second World War, as the people united to fight for survival. But it flared up again immediately after the war, as did similar rivalry in other villages. Both clubs organized musical bands for the first time. After a series of incidents which culminated in the parish priest again having to send for police protection, this time against angry St. Martin supporters, the rivalry began to decline somewhat. This decline was brought about chiefly by the effects of emigration, improvements in local transport, the establishment of a number

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

of new associations in the village and the increased activity of political parties.

During the mid-'fifties emigration drained away many of the most active supporters of the partiti. In 1954 alone, no fewer than two dozen men between 18 and 38 left the village for Australia and Canada. Each club lost key bandsmen, and the two bands, already heavily bolstered with outside players, never recovered. A constantly improving bus service enabled young men to go to the 'talkies' in other villages, or just stroll up and down Kingsway in Valletta – a very popular pastime with young people from all over Malta – instead of spending the evening in their village clubs. During this period the Football Club, MUSEUM and Catholic Action were established in the village and began to draw potential partit leaders into other spheres of activity. The Football Club was particularly damaging in this respect. As a neutral social club it provided a place where the young men of the two partiti, who normally never entered one another's clubs, could meet. A number of friendships developed between them, and it soon became the most popular club in the village. Finally, the increased activity of the national political parties during the elections in 1950, 1951, 1953 and 1955 drew the attention of the villagers away from purely parochial concerns and bound them up in rivalries of a different order, which often cut across traditional allegiances. This created factions within the clubs and weakened the partiti.

Rivalry flared up again in 1960, when the supporters of St. Martin, intent upon celebrating the centenary of their patron, staged the greatest festa in the history of the village. But the political and religious fervour of the 1961 election campaign soon captured the attention of the partisans, and the festa of the following year was a pale shadow of the gala spectacle of the year before.

Before proceeding any further, we must unravel the rather complicated tangle of partit, club and confraternity. All festa partiti are composed of three groups: (i) the band club, which provides the leadership of the partit and includes most of the active male supporters, many of whom are also members of (ii) the confraternity allied with the partit or dedicated to its patron, and (iii) the rank and file of men, women and children who are members neither of the confraternity nor of the club, but still support the partit against its rival. The central strand running through all

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

these groups is the loyalty of the people to the partit and its patron, shown by supporting the many activities that the leaders organize, and by boycotting similar activities of their rivals. These include fund-raising lotteries and fairs, weekly collections and partit picnics and pilgrimages. During the festa, supporters march with the statue, dress themselves and their houses up and in general celebrate their patron. Their rivals often walk about unshaven and glowering, and do not normally decorate their houses.

Although most people in a village divided by this type of rivalry will choose, or be forced, to take sides, a few are able to avoid this commitment, or at least say they have. These are often priests and teachers, who sometimes find it to their advantage to remain neutral, as do outsiders who have married into the village. MUSEUM members are not permitted to maintain partit affiliation though, of course, many do. Neutral people contribute to both feasts. A true partisan would never contribute to the external feast of his rival, although he might give something to the parish priest for the internal feast. During periods of intense rivalry, even these contributions cease. Thus, virtually the entire £1,465 which St. Martin's centenary cost was contributed by his supporters alone. Six months later their rivals spent £600 on the feast of St. Roque.

The band club is the organizational and social centre of a partit. All members of the club are supporters of the partit, but not all supporters of the partit are members of the club, though nonmembers are normally welcome to come and use its facilities. To a certain extent, membership of the club depends upon the availability of ready cash, for many men are reluctant to part with the subscription fee as long as they can make use of the club's premises. Though the confraternities are open to all adults without regard to partit affiliation, there is normally a positive correlation between partit and confraternity membership. Generally speaking, the supporters of the titular feast enrol in the older confraternities of the Blessed Sacrament and the Holy Rosary. These confraternities are established in all parishes, and play an important part in many religious ceremonies. Supporters of the secondary patron enrol in the confraternity dedicated to him, if they feel inclined to join one.

These general principles can be illustrated by data collected in Farrug. Table No. 4 below shows the relative strengths of the two

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

Marriages between
621 members of rival partiti are regarded as undesirable. They occa-
[582] sionally take place, but the division of loyalty within the nuclear
[586] family which results often leads to quarrels and, occasionally, to
[593] temporary separations. (The favourite festa-time story of the wife
[538] who refuses to cook for her husband because he belongs to the other partit is based on fact!) Of the marriages contracted within Farrug, 72 per cent took place between members of the same partit. Children of mixed marriages support the feast of their favourite parent: boys normally follow their fathers and girls their mothers.

578 I recorded only two cases in Farrug of adults who changed
621 their partit affiliation. Both occurred over fifty years ago. A leading member of the St. Roque partit left it after a heated quarrel with Dun Rokku over the design for new street decorations. He subsequently became one of the other partit's most honoured members, and even wrote a book on the life of St. Martin. The second man left St. Roque when he married the daughter of the president of the St. Martin club. I was told that the girl's father had insisted on the change before he gave his consent to the marriage. The young man went on to become president of the club, as did his only son. In another village a few young men left their partit after a quarrel with one of the leaders, but all returned after a year.

621 Although an outsider who marries into a village generally supports the partit of his spouse, a few of them, particularly the men, succeed in remaining neutral. Of the 122 outsiders who married into Farrug,[1] 28 per cent of the men but only 8 per cent of the women remained uncommitted. A few even chose to support partiti opposed to those of their spouses. Thus a women from Qrendi who married a St. Martin supporter and moved to Farrug became a follower of St. Roque because she had been a keen member of the secondary partit in her native village. Children of families in which one of the parents is an outsider, especially if the parent remains neutral, often support the partit of their friends rather than those of their parents or siblings. A case in point is that of the president of the St. Roque club, and his brother. Their father was an outsider who, because of his position as headmaster, made a point of remaining strictly neutral. Though his wife was from a St. Martin family, one son supported St. Martin, the other St. Roque.

[162] [1] 63 men and 61 women. These marriages represent 34 per cent of the total in the village.

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

residence pattern is certainly true in Farrug, and I observed much the same thing in other villages divided by festa partiti. In Farrug, 65 per cent of the people living on the main square and the four streets leading into it supported St. Martin, but only 46 per cent of those living in other parts of the village did so.

Disputes between partiti usually concern matters of precedence or their ability to display devotion to their saints. Each partit has certain rights, usually secured at the cost of clashes with its rival. These include the position and participation of the club and confraternity in Church processions and at other functions, the routes over which these processions travel and the possession of certain property and its display in the parish church. Any attempt to extend or reduce them is resisted by the partit affected, which takes action to protect its interests by trying to influence the Church authorities, who must make the final decisions.

The structural position of a partit determines the kind of pressure that it can bring to bear upon the Church. Those of titular saints are, in a sense, the establishment parties. As we have seen, the Church seeks to build up their celebrations at the expense of the secondary ones. Hence a titular partit can negotiate from a strong position: its ultimate sanction is refusal to participate in the feast of the village patron, an event which the Church is anxious to see celebrated with great pomp. Secondary partiti, on the other hand, are inherently opposed to the Church in matters of festa policy. They try to increase the scale of their feasts, while the Church tries to reduce them. They dare not cancel their feasts for fear that the Church would accuse them of making trouble and suppress them, as it did the secondary festas of Our Lady of Lourdes in Qrendi, and St. Michael in Żabbar.

Their position in opposition to Church policy has given most secondary partiti a certain *esprit de corps* and unity of purpose that their rivals often lack. This has made them better able to withstand the divisive effects of the political factions which have recently weakened many of their rivals. It has also generally resulted in the emergence of stronger leaders. Secondary partiti are often united around a single professional class leader who can not only hold the partit together in the face of the attacks of its opponents, but can also argue intricate points of Canon Law with the monsignori at the Curia and, at times, with the Archbishop himself. As we have observed, the secondary partiti generally have

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

fewer professional class members. Consequently competition for the role of leader does not occur so often, and there is a longer tenure of office. In the partit of a titular saint, with its better-educated members, there are more men with the necessary qualities of leadership, and accordingly more competition for office and a high turnover of office holders. The competition both creates and results from internal factions which weaken the group. In Farrug, for example, the President of the St. Roque Band Club has led the St. Roque partit more or less continuously since Dun Rokku died thirty years ago. He is also just about the only member of the partit with the educational qualifications and social position required of a leader. The key positions of the St. Martin Band Club, in contrast, constantly pass between about half a dozen educated persons. This divided leadership has weakened the club; and on one occasion it even split in two. The strong leadership and internal unity of the secondary partiti, plus the fact that they rarely present claims that are not well founded, has enabled them to score many successes in spite of their apparently unfavourable position in relation to the Church.

Disputes between festa partiti are all very much alike. A typical dispute begins when leaders of a secondary partit petition the parish priest for some new privilege, for example the right to renew the bouquets of artificial flowers which adorn the statue of their saint. The parish priest normally refuses at first, and tells them that he thinks the old flowers are quite serviceable. His policy is to let sleeping dogs lie. Moreover, he has to take into account the rule that decorations for secondary feasts must not be more beautiful than those for titular ones. But the saint's supporters continue to bring influence to bear on him. In the meantime, members of the titular partit have learned of their rivals' move and rush to the parish priest to point out that the old flowers are more than adequate. They threaten to cancel their feast if he gives in on this matter. The priest is now caught in a vice, and the pressure on him builds up. Finally, he agrees to refer the whole case to the Curia and passes the matter upwards, usually with a feeling of relief. Relations between him and the partiti return to normal, as the scene of the struggle shifts to the Curia.

The Curia normally appoints experts to re-investigate the merits of the case, including the proposed design of the flowers. Leaders from both partiti spend a great deal of their time at the

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

578 621 793 794 Curia trying to persuade all concerned, from the Bishop down, to think the way they do. This may go on for years, for the Curia, knowing the trouble that lies ahead, is usually in no hurry to give its decision. When the final decision is handed down, it is usually favourable, and the design for a set of flowers less beautiful and costly than the corresponding set of the titular partit is furnished. The secondary partit then instructs the craftsmen to begin work. The titular partit announces to everyone that it will cancel its next feast.

It often happens, however, that just before the new bouquets (or whatever *objets d'art* are concerned) are inaugurated during the secondary festa, the parish priest discovers that most of the Curia's specifications have been ignored. The new flowers are far more beautiful than they were supposed to be. He is furious. The guilty leaders of the secondary partit apologize profusely and take immediate steps to make them less beautiful. Occasionally, the priest may discipline the partit by temporarily reducing the scale of its feast. The secondary partit then holds its feast, and the flowers are admired by all visitors. Strong police reinforcements usually prevent trouble from occurring. Relations between the parish priest and the titular partit are gradually re-established and it agrees, usually for some concessions on his part, to celebrate its feast again. But in a year or so, a new dispute occurs, and the process starts all over again.

578 621 625 793 794 Sometimes relations between a parish priest and a partit reach a deadlock that can be broken only by an outside peacemaker, frequently an officer of the police. The police in any case have a vital interest in the degree of rivalry existing in the villages, as it is their business to keep order during the feast. The number of police on duty at these times ranges from a dozen or so in villages such as Siġġiewi and Naxxar, where there are no partiti, to around 100 in those where there are strong ones, such as Mqabba and Żurrieq. Occasionally a parish priest is threatened, frightened by a home-made bomb, or attacked; he then often requests, and generally receives, a transfer to another parish.

543 575 578 621 So far only the more important encounters between partiti have been discussed. There are many other events to keep their rivalry alive throughout the year. The numerous fund-raising fairs of the band clubs are occasions for the village to divide along festa partit lines. While supporters of the partit running the fair flock

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

to it, their rivals invariably stage their own fair or, and this is more usual, hire several buses and noisily leave the village for a picnic or a pilgrimage to some shrine of their saint. Many other incidents divide groups and associations along partit lines. For example, a former head teacher of the Farrug school told me that he had once tried to get the girls to wear the dark blue hair ribbons which are supposed to be part of their school uniforms. He was astounded when half the girls flatly refused. It was then explained to him that blue is the colour of the St. Roque partit, so the St. Martin girls could not be expected to wear it.

Let us now look at some of the major skirmishes which have taken place in Farrug during the last ten years. During 1952 and 1953 there was a dispute over an attempt by the St. Roque procession to pass along a street over which St. Martin's followers claimed exclusive rights. When the inexperienced new parish priest backed the St. Roque claim before the Archbishop, he brought violently into the open a dispute over which his predecessor had successfully procrastinated for years. The followers of St. Martin not only refused to celebrate their feast, but also succeeded in frightening the unfortunate priest rather badly by exploding a huge rocket in the drainpipe under his house. Some St. Martin partisans gleefully recounted to me that the priest was soon transferred to another parish, and that during his last week in Farrug he had asked the police to escort him between his house and the church. Relations between the Church and the St. Martin partit were restored when the Archbishop modified the St. Roque procession route.

In 1956 the St. Martin Band Club refused to celebrate the titular festa because the Archbishop had given the Confraternity of St. Roque permission to renew the four bunches of artificial flowers which decorate the main altar during his feast. The following year the St. Roque Band Club refused to play at the installation ceremony of the new parish priest because the Curia had just turned down the confraternity's request for permission to hang a new picture over its altar. In 1960 the same priest angered the St. Roque partit by refusing to let it participate in the St. Martin centenary celebrations. The poor man's hands were tied, for the St. Martin club had declared that it would have nothing to do with the feast if its rival took any part in it. At the moment, there is another struggle in the offing. The Confraternity of St. Roque

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

578 621 79 recently petitioned the Archbishop for permission to renew the platform on which their saint stands during the feast. St. Martin supporters have threatened to cancel their feast if permission is granted, as it probably will be, for the present platform is old and falling to pieces.

575 578 621 793 While I was in the village, there was also a dispute over precedence between the two band clubs on the occasion of the installation ceremony of Dun Frangisk, the present parish priest. This is a good example of a dispute over precedence, and it is one which recurs in some form every time a new parish priest is appointed to a village where there are two band clubs. The band which has precedence has the right to march last and to escort the priest from the church to his house after the ceremony. The other club escorts him from his house to the church before the ceremony. Quite straightforward, but clubs rarely agree on which one has precedence. The dispute thus presents a knotty problem that brings a new priest abruptly up against the realities of parish politics within a few days after his arrival. His handling of the matter may well govern his relations with the partiti during the rest of his time in the village.

On the evening when Dun Frangisk moved into the parish, the St. Martin Band Club gave a party to welcome him and to bid farewell to his predecessor, who had been its strong ally. The party was a great success. The departing priest received a huge coloured portrait of St. Martin as a farewell gift, and Dun Frangisk met all the St. Martin leaders and blessed the club's new television set. A few days later, the St. Martin leaders called on the new priest and offered to provide a musical escort to and from the church for his installation ceremony. This was to be followed by a concert in the square and a firework display. The offer pleased him and he accepted. During the next few days the St. Martin club went about collecting the £25 the band programme would cost, thus advising the village of its plans.

Until then Dun Frangisk had heard nothing from the St. Roque club, a fact which rather disturbed him.

Two days later he called in person at both clubs to invite them to attend his installation ceremony and the reception following it. But he found the clubs deserted. The members of the St. Martin committee were away offering their congratulations to the old parish priest, who that night was holding his installation ceremony

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

in his new parish. Most of the St. Roque leaders, for their part, were off supervising a fund-raising fair which they had hastily organized to help ensure that no St. Roque supporter would be tempted to attend the lavish reception of their former antagonist. Finding no one of importance at the clubs, Dun Frangisk left the invitations with the bar-keepers.

Two days later a group of St. Roque leaders called to thank him for his invitation, at the same time informing him that they were looking forward to escorting him to and from the church with their band. Dun Frangisk had been warned by his predecessor that this might happen, so he asked them to meet him the next evening to discuss the details of the programme with the other club.

Next morning the members of the St. Martin partit were furious over this move of their rivals. They grumbled to me that now only a miracle could save the band programme they had been planning. It was the main topic of conversation in the village that day. Many people were on hand to watch the St. Martin committee members enter the parish priest's house that afternoon. Soon after, the rival delegation, headed by the vice-president, the secretary and the treasurer of the St. Roque Band Club, joined the meeting. The first session lasted two hours. I saw the young priest shortly afterwards. He looked rather stunned, and exclaimed, 'They can't agree. They both want to escort me to my house! It's like a U.N. session. Nothing is settled and we meet again in an hour.' I learned later that he had had a difficult time preventing the rivals from coming to blows.

They met again, but the deadlock remained unbroken. The St. Martin delegates maintained that their club had the right to escort the priest to his house because it was the oldest, it represented the official patron saint of the village and it had been the only one to play during the past two installation ceremonies. Their rivals rejected all these claims, and suggested that they draw lots for the privilege of playing last, or hire outside bands to play, and let them decide. The St. Martin representatives rejected these suggestions. Finally, at midnight, the parish priest put an end to the wrangle. He told them that unless they could decide the matter among themselves, he would have to decline their offers to play for him. He asked them to let him have their decision by the following evening.

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

575 The next day each delegation called separately on Dun Frangisk and told him that they had not been able to reach a decision. 578 In fact, they had not met again. St. Martin supporters were very 621 bitter about the whole affair, and said that since they could not 783 play, they would also cancel the firework display they had been planning.

The installation ceremony took place three days later as planned. Neither band played, but each fired off a number of petards during the day, and each gave the newly installed priest a rousing salute of fire crackers on his return from the church. The leaders of both partiti attended his reception, separately to be sure, and they were very cordial in their congratulations. The skirmish was over. St. Martin leaders admitted to me that Dun Frangisk had handled himself well, and that he had taken the only sensible course open to him. They declared, however, that he should not have called in person to invite the St. Roque club, but should have sent the more usual printed invitation. The St. Roque leaders, on the other hand, were quite pleased with the way things had gone. They invited Dun Frangisk to a reception in his honour at their club the following week, and shortly afterwards asked him to support their request for a new platform for their saint.

This whole episode must be seen as an attempt by the St. Roque partit to unseat its rival from the position of pre-eminence it had enjoyed during the centenary celebration. It could do this by blocking the St. Martin club's plan to be the only band to play at the installation ceremony. The St. Roque leaders were able to make their first move when Dun Frangisk called in person at their club, thereby assuring them that they be given equal standing with the other, which they felt had been favoured by his predecessor. They would not have made their offer to play if there had been the slightest indication that Dun Frangisk was going to favour their rivals. In fact it is extremely unlikely that the St. Roque club was really planning to play. It had not done so for many years, it had no bandsmen and at the time it did not even have a bandmaster. Finally, it had made no collection to pay for a band. All these facts were known to the St. Martin supporters when they [521] made their offer to play. Furthermore, they had heard indirectly from the St. Roque secretary – who told a policemen in a neighbouring town, who in turn mentioned it to the president of the

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

St. Martin club – that the St. Roque club was not planning to participate in the ceremony in protest against the way they had been treated during the centenary. Dun Frangisk's spontaneous move upset their plans.

Although Dun Frangisk favoured the suggestions that the clubs draw lots, or hire outside bands, St. Martin rejected both because they implied that the clubs had equal status. The last time the St. Roque band had played was six years and four parish priests before, when the local police inspector had devised a compromise solution, and the St. Martin leaders had 'allowed' St. Roque to play the last march of the day, while their band escorted the new priest home. They believed any concession they made now would undo the advantage which they felt they had gained as the only functioning band in the village during the past six years.

Thus it came about that no band played at Dun Frangisk's installation ceremony. This greatly surprised the many visitors from the city and the suburbs, but the good people of the district found it quite in accordance with the way things should be, considering the issues involved. At no point in the series of events were the feelings of the young priest, whom all liked, ever considered. His installation had become the vehicle for a clash between the followers of St. Martin and St. Roque. They had been vying with each other for supremacy long before he was born, and would be at it long after he left. Any concessions made for his sake would have to be entered into the eighty-year-old ledger of credits and debits, and might have an important bearing on the outcome of the next series of encounters.

III

Two interesting problems remain to be considered: why festa partiti arose during the fifty years or so after 1850, and what reasons prompted people to join one partit rather than its rival. The factors which caused the partiti to come into existence at this particular period in Maltese history are necessarily complex, and they are dimmed by the time that has elapsed since their foundation. Nonetheless, one can discern several elements which would appear to be related to the general problem. To begin with, during this period there was a sudden increase in the devotion to the Virgin Mary following her apparition in 1858 at Lourdes, and the

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

Whatever the reasons for their beginnings in particular villages, there are today festa partiti or at least competing band clubs in nineteen villages and towns. Ten communities are divided by the type of rivalry described above. Of these Gudja has partiti which compete only over two secondary feasts and another, Żebbuġ, has three rival band clubs, two of which compete over the titular feast. Besides these ten, another four towns are divided by rivalry between their constituent parishes, five more are divided by rival band clubs not related to the cult of saints, although the band clubs in one of them, Żabbar, were once allied to festa partiti.

The competition between rival parishes of the same town is very similar to that between festa partiti. In fact the division of Qormi and Rabat (Gozo) into two parishes each came about partly because of the rivalry between festa partiti. Since each parish has its own church and is not limited by the 1935 regulations, the competition between them is even keener than between festa partiti within the same parish. For this reason the feasts of St. Mary and St. George in Rabat (Gozo) and St. George and St. Sebastian in Qormi are probably the most spectacular in the country. Competition between rival band clubs not related to the cult of saints, in contrast, is not as fierce as that between festa partiti. It is, nonetheless, a considerable force in the communities where it exists. Disputes between these band clubs usually involve questions of precedence, such as those which arise over their positions and role during the titular festa or at an installation ceremony of a new parish priest. Failure to reach agreement may mean that one or both boycott the celebration.

Finally, weak festa partiti once existed in another seven villages. But as they were not aligned with band or social clubs, they were not well enough organized to resist the firm pressure the Church began to exert after 1935. Today there is scarcely a trace of their former existence. All festa partiti and rival band clubs, both present and past, are listed in Appendix A.[1]

IV

Implicit throughout this examination of the various types of competing groups described in this chapter and in the previous one, has been the highly formal nature of their interaction. Their disputes are like war games. The action between them takes place

[1] [See p. 142. – Analyst]

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

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within a framework bounded by the decrees of the Church, the laws of the State and the appropriate body of custom. New pictures are not hung in churches and new procession routes are not followed unless permission has first been obtained from the Church. Action without this permission could result in the suppression of the feast, the desecration of the church or the interdiction of the ringleaders. In the same way, the threats and insults of demonstrating partisans rarely result in physical violence because of the swift penalties that the ever-vigilant police would impose. Permanent truce or peace between the partiti and competing parishes is impossible to achieve owing to the inherent nature of the rivalry which exists between them. It is this state of continuous one-upmanship that provides the driving force behind much of the village politics in Malta. At least it did until the increasing involvement of the people in national politics created a new set of conflicting loyalties that cut deeply across many older ones.

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

CHAPTER VII

National Politics and the Village

In the last few years issues of national policy have taken an increasingly important place in the villages alongside the purely parochial ones we discussed in the preceding two chapters. Divisions based on opposed political ideologies are now reflected in the groups and associations in which people spend their time. The major division which cuts across all Maltese villages is based not so much upon rivalry between political parties, as upon the present conflict between the Malta Labour Party and the Church. But as has been observed, conflict between the Church and a political party is not new to Malta. It also existed during the late 'twenties and early 'thirties.

The dispute between the Labour Party and the Church is essentially a struggle for power. Dom Mintoff, the Labour leader, accuses the Archbishop Gonzi of siding with Britain to maintain Malta's colonial status, and with interfering in politics by attacking the Labour Party and its leaders. In its 1962 Electoral Manifesto the MLP proclaims the right of a person 'to fulfil his civic duty without pseudo-religious interference'; sees as a crime 'any interference with the right of a democratically elected majority to implement the people's mandate', and advocates the 'abolition of medieval privileges which have retarded [the country's] social and economic progress.'[1] The Church sees this not only as a direct attack on the basic right and duty of a bishop to teach and to guard the morals of his flock,[2] but also as a move to destroy its traditional position in Maltese society. In particular it fears that if the Labour Party were returned to power, it would enact legislation which would render the Archbishop liable to prosecution before the criminal court if he were to comment on the political issues of the day.

These opposing views are expressed in the slogans written on

[1] See Appendix B for the 1962 MLP Electoral Manifesto.
[2] Cf. William E. Addis and others, '*Bishop*', *A Catholic Dictionary*, pp. 80 ff.

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

208 578 665 795 walls and shouted at public meetings. Mintoff is portrayed as a Socialist devil working to give the islands over to Communism in the manner of Cuba's Castro. These are some typical examples of the ones that appeared on the blackboard outside the Kortin Catholic Action centre: 'Mintoff is the enemy of the Church', 'Nobody can serve both God and the Devil', '"The Bishops are interfering in politics!" That is what Communists say,' and 'We don't want Communists among us!' In stating their case, Mintoff and his supporters did not mince words either, as the following slogans that appeared on the blackboard of the Kortin Labour Party club demonstrate: 'We want a chance in court about the $60,000 lie',[1] 'With the Papal flag in their hands and shouting for vengeance', 'A fish begins to stink from its head',[2] and 'In Gozo they told the women that we have tails.'

208 578 665 794 795 The popular slogan 'Either with the Bishop or against the Church!' sums up the uncompromising attitude of the Church. Most of the sanctions it has imposed have presented that choice to the people in unequivocal terms. Early in May 1961, shortly after the Labour leaders were interdicted, all Church lay societies were instructed to obtain from each member a pledge of his full and unqualified support for the Archbishop. Those that declined to give this were expelled from the society concerned and their names reported to the national office of Catholic Action. But a more drastic sanction was imposed a few weeks later. After the [783] [626] Executive of the Labour Party had invited the Archbishop and the Bishop of Gozo to debate their policy in public at a Labour rally in Cospicua, the Bishops replied to this insult by issuing a circular which declared it a mortal sin to print, write for, sell, buy, distribute or read the Labour Party newspapers. All confessors were instructed to put the necessary questions to their penitents.

578 665 794 795 [851] [608] Hence, to remain a Labour supporter, a person has to forego the Church sacraments that he has been brought up to believe vital to his happiness and spiritual salvation. This is a very serious choice for a practising Catholic, and before these sanctions were imposed, the Maltese were among the most devoutly Catholic people in the world. It has also meant that MLP supporters cannot

[1] This refers to the Archbishop's charge, made at a rally in March 1961, that Mintoff had received $61,000 from the allegedly Communist dominated Afro-Asian Peoples' Solidarity Organization, which the MLP had just joined.

[539] [2] A Maltese proverb meaning that corruption first becomes apparent among people in high places. This was presumably directed against the Archbishop.

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

act as godparents. For this reason a number of people, prevented from inviting relatives and friends to fill this office, have preferred not to baptize their children.

Many have bowed to the authority of the Church and have stopped supporting the Labour Party. But in spite of everything that has been preached on the subject, many others still feel that there is nothing incompatible between support of their political leader and loyalty to their religion. This view is expressed in the slogan which is displayed so often at MLP rallies that it has become almost a party motto: 'With Mintoff always, against the Church never.' Although they are told from the pulpit that it does them no good, most members of the Labour Party continue to attend the daily or weekly services of worship that they have been going to since childhood. Besides, many have rationalized their action by saying that the Archbishop of Malta is acting for personal and political motives; as long as the Pope himself does not condemn the MLP they will continue to support it. This attitude is reinforced by the experience of some Labour supporters who have been absolved while on holiday or on duty with the military services in countries where it is possible to be a Socialist and a practising Catholic at the same time.

As a result of these sanctions many have turned their backs on the Church and no longer attend religious services. Before this struggle between the MLP and the Church, it would have been unthinkable for anyone in a small village to stay away from church. A civil servant in one village told me that he had been a confirmed atheist for years. Yet until this past year he had gone to church every Sunday. In his words, 'People make it very difficult for someone who does not go to church, and I have to live here all my life. Besides, I might lose my job if people complained about me.' But he is now an open supporter of the Labour Party and no longer feels obliged to go to church. To some extent, then, the sanctions of the Church have created a social role for the non-practising Catholic.

The attitude of many who support the Labour Party is summed up in the words of a twenty-year-old bus conductor in Kortin. We were sitting around a table in a small wine shop when I asked him why he supported the MLP in spite of the opposition of the Church to it and the fact that Mintoff was regarded as a Communist by so many in the village. He replied in English, 'I am

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

578 665 794 795 829 [115] young, I cannot even vote in the next election. But I must think of the future. I feel that Mintoff is doing what is right for Malta. He helped the poor people when he made the government. The Church fights Mintoff because she fears she will lose her privileges and power if he wins, and that he will tax her property. The Church is in favour of keeping people ignorant, and limiting their education. Why? Because when people are educated they think for themselves and can judge. They no longer follow blindly. Besides, you should not take too seriously all this talk of Communism – they are products of this fight. In a fight, people use all means available.'

The street sweeper who was with us understood most of the conversation and shook his head in disagreement. His only comment was the proverb, 'A ship with two captains can't sail' (*Il-vapur biż-żewġ kaptani ma jimxiex*). At this every one in the shop nodded in agreement, for both Labour and Church supporters had different captains in mind. Those who support the Archbishop look to him as the leader of the Maltese people. They make little distinction between Church and State. Labour supporters, in contrast, make a clear distinction. Mintoff is their candidate for head of State, and since they see the Archbishop as interfering with their choice, they accuse him of reaching out to control both Church and State.

[539]

II

578 665 794 [793] At the village level, this conflict has brought about a bitter division. All societies and groups which are not formally identified with one side or the other, have been divided and weakened by politically based factions. The parish priest is the leader of those who support the Archbishop. His most enthusiastic followers are the clergy and the members of the lay societies. This group, with the other prominent villagers who make up the parish priest's circle, provide the hard core of the active opposition to the MLP. Considering the offices that they occupy and the societies to which they belong, it could hardly be otherwise. They usually meet in the club houses of the societies, but sometimes the older members meet in a particular café.

The hard core of the Labour group is made up of the officers of the local MLP Committee and the members who openly frequent the club. There is very little contact between the leaders and

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

active members of the two sides. But there are a number of persons who would like to avoid having to make a break with either side. For the most part they keep quiet about their political views. But the Church sanctions and the pressure exerted by relatives, friends and workmates is slowly reducing their numbers.

Affiliation is expressed in very much the same way as with the festa partiti. That is, supporters participate in their side's activities and boycott those of their opponents. The activities of those who support the Archbishop centre on the lay apostolate societies. The leaders of these groups, with the parish priest, usually organize the buses that take villagers to the rallies of the Diocesan Junta, which are usually held in front of the Floriana parish church. More recently, separate parishes have organized rallies and pilgrimages of reparation a few days after the Labour Party has held a meeting in the village. An official visit of the Archbishop to a village also provides an occasion for a big demonstration by his supporters in his honour. Bus-loads of colleagues from other parishes often swell the ranks of the local lay societies during their demonstrations. They in turn attend similar meetings in other parishes. Occasionally they unite and act in opposition to MLP meetings in their own and other parishes. More often though, they organize picnics or pilgrimages to take supporters out of the village when their opponents have arranged an event. Supporters of the Archbishop show their allegiance by decorating their houses with pictures of him and with yellow and white Papal flags. Many also buy the newspapers of Catholic Action and the Young Christian Workers.

Enthusiasm for the struggle, which had assumed something of the character of a Holy War when I left Malta, has gripped both young and old. For example, at an MLP meeting in Birkirkara in May 1961 I saw a black-cowled MUSEUM woman herding a group of youngsters up against a police cordon. All were blowing whistles as loudly as they could. A little later a scuffle broke out between MLP supporters and organized parties from the lay religious societies who had surrounded the meeting. But a police water cannon promptly dampened their enthusiasm. In another village, opponents of the MLP rang the bells of the parish church to drown out the Labour voices. This technique, in fact, was first used in Gozo at a big MLP rally there in April, where it proved so successful that not one of the speakers was able to make himself

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

578 665 794 heard. The meeting was finally called off, and the large MLP delegation from Malta was literally routed. They had to return on foot from Rabat to the ferry, as the bus drivers refused them transport. During the long walk to the ferry, the Labour partisans were ambushed and rather badly mauled by groups of men, women and children from all over Gozo. The ardour of many Gozitans had been worked up by lay leaders who toured the villages for several days beforehand. But besides their religious fervour, there was a considerable element of parochial pride, and the feeling that 'we'll show these Maltese invaders a thing or two.' In all, forty persons were reported injured. The Gozitans were extremely proud of their victory, and the local branch of the Social Action Movement published a booklet to commemorate the occasion.[1]

665 The activity of Labour supporters centres on their local Party club or committee, which arranges for transportation to national MLP rallies and conducts lectures and classes on the political aims of the Party. It also organizes social evenings and outings for Labour supporters. The members of the Local Committee take charge of the preparations for national meetings held in their own village. Local Committees take the initiative in preparing floats, decorated carts and companies in costume for the annual MLP demonstration on the First of May. For the past few years the [796] MLP Executive has also organized a carnival celebration for its supporters to induce them to boycott the official government-[204] sponsored carnival.[2] Labour supporters read the Labour daily newspaper, *Il-Helsien* (Freedom), and the Sunday *Voice of Malta*. Since the condemnation, *Il-Helsien* has become a party badge. It is pasted on bus windows during MLP excursions, worn as an armband at rallies and in general used by Labour supporters to taunt their opponents. I have even seen some young men in Kortin swagger into church on Sunday morning with copies of it sticking out of their hip pockets.

578 665 All supporters of the Labour Party do not show their allegiance this openly, for many wish to avoid the break with a large section of the community which would follow such action. Some are teachers or civil servants who fear lest their open support for the

[1] *Ghawdex Jiddefendi L-Knisja* [Gozo defends the Church] (Gozo: Social Action Movement, 1961).

[2] The government at this time was administered by a British Chief Secretary, and the [648] MLP ordered members to stay away from all events it organized.

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

MLP cost them their jobs.[1] Others have friends or relatives on the other side with whom they do not wish to break. Yet others, responsible for maintaining the unity of a neutral club, fear that an open stand will bring about a crisis which would divide it. Although most of these persons continue to read the condemned papers, they do so discreetly, for reading them openly would provoke incidents. There are also a large number of Labour sympathizers who have been unwilling to forego the sacraments of the Church. They no longer read the Labour papers or attend MLP rallies, but they are bitter about having been forced to make the choice.

The physical act of purchasing a Labour newspaper has in itself become a public statement of political allegiance. After the condemnation and the threat of a general Church boycott of their premises (which was carried out in Gozo) most vendors have refused to handle MLP publications. In the villages they can usually only be bought at the local MLP club. Thus the act of striding across the village square and into the stronghold of the devil, performed in front of many of the village elders, becomes an open declaration of sympathy with the Labour cause. In Kortin many wait until the square is empty, usually around midnight in the summer, and then scuttle into the club to get their papers.

III

There is a correlation between occupational class and support for one of these two ideological divisions. In general, professionals, white-collar workers and farmers support the Archbishop, and industrial labourers the Labour Party. There are several reasons for this. To begin with, the Labour Party is a working-man's party, and there is ideological support for it on that account. Although the MLP has a definitely socialist ideology, and is a member of the Socialist International (points on which the Church attacks it regularly), it advocates few of the measures associated with doctrinaire Socialism, such as public ownership of transport and industry or the collectivization of farming. On the other hand, it does promise equal opportunity for all, and 'the right of the

[1] The Malta Government Circular of 19 October 1960 prohibited most grades of civil servants from holding office in political organizations or publicly expressing their political views. This regulation is something of a paradox in a small country in which most intellectuals work for the government in one capacity or another.

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

Grand Harbour and first establish themselves in the conurbation surrounding it has helped to keep the farmer devoutly tied to the Church. For this reason the action of the MLP in challenging the authority of the Bishops is as abhorrent to him as it is difficult to understand.

The recent sanctions of the Church have increased the class alignment of those who support the Labour Party and those who oppose it. This is largely because those with high social status have more to lose than industrial workers, and are thus more vulnerable to the pressure of public opinion and the Church. The increasingly heavy pressure of the Church has forced many of the young professionals and intellectuals to abandon the party for which they voted in 1955. But even when the MLP was in office, its policies began to alarm many in the professional and middle classes. They objected not only to Mintoff's attitude to the Church, but also to the somewhat abrupt way his government occasionally dealt with the professional and business communities. Many were disturbed by the MLP's rather sudden switch from advocating integration with Britain to demanding complete independence. As most of those who left the party or became inactive in it were moderates, both in their approach to the Church and to the economic and political problems facing Malta, the MLP has become more extreme in its outlook. This in turn induced others to leave it. This process was accelerated by the regulations which prohibited the better-educated civil servants from taking an active part in the political life of their country.

Table 7 below shows the rough correlation between occupational class and support of the Malta Labour Party. In particular, it demonstrates that as the proportion of skilled workers decreases, so does the proportion of voters who support Labour. Other variables are the number of professionals and farmers. The Second and Fourth Electoral Districts polled the highest number of Labour votes in the 1962 election, and the Sixth and Tenth the lowest. The MLP polled 56 per cent of the total votes in the Second Electoral District, where 45 per cent of the working population are classified as skilled labourers.

In contrast, it received only 6 per cent of the votes in Gozo, where only 16 per cent of the people are skilled labourers, but 38 per cent are engaged in agriculture. Another important variable is the number of clergy resident in a district. The relatively high

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

proportion of clerics and nuns in the Sixth Electoral District helps to explain the relatively low Labour poll there. It is also a significant factor in explaining the overwhelming defeat of the MLP in Gozo. These two districts have the highest proportion of clerics in the country. The Fourth District, in contrast, has the lowest.

TABLE 7. 1962 Elections:
Occupational Class and Voting Behaviour[1]

ELECTORAL DISTRICTS[2]	SELECTED OCCUPATIONAL CATEGORIES (As percentage of total lab. force)			PERCENTAGE LABOUR VOTES
	Professional[3]	*Skilled*	*Agricultural*	
IInd (Senglea, etc.)	4 (3)	45	4	56
IVth (Zurrieq, etc.)	3 (2)	34	11	47
VIth (Birkirkara, etc.)	6 (4)	33	11	24
Xth (Gozo)	7 (6)	16	38	6
All Districts	5 (3)	32	11	34

IV

It will have been observed that there is a certain superficial similarity between the reasons given here for belonging to the MLP and those suggested in the preceding chapter for recruitment into the secondary festa partiti. One might expect therefore that in comparison with titular partiti, secondary partiti would have a higher proportion of Labour supporters among their members. Unfortunately, owing to the disturbed political situation prevailing at the time, I was not able to gather satisfactory systematic data on this point. Almost all informants with whom I discussed the matter suggested that secondary partiti did in fact have more pro-Mintoff members than their rivals. But the situation is not quite as straightforward as it might appear. To begin with, the statements of informants varied according to their own political beliefs and their position in relation to the festa partiti. Rivals generally tried to place each other in an unfavourable light. Thus an anti-MLP member of a band club supporting a titular feast

[1] Source: *1957 Census: Report on Economic Activities*, pp. 40–111; and *The Malta Government Gazette* (3 March 1962), pp. 585–94.
[2] *IInd* (Cospicua, Senglea, Vittoriosa, Kalkara, Żabbar, M'skala), *IVth* (Zurrieq, Safi, Qrendi, Mqabba, Kirkop, B'bugia, Żejtun, M'xlokk), *VIth* (Birkirkara, Balzan, Lija, Attard, Naxxar, Gharghur).
[3] Percentage of priests, monks and nuns in parenthesis.

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

575 578 621 665 would describe the rival club as a Mintoff stronghold, but suggested that his own club had relatively few MLP members. In contrast, a member of the rival club with the same political view would often say just the opposite. Parish priests generally gave very conservative estimates of the number of MLP supporters in the clubs, but usually said that the secondary clubs had more.

621 665 [464] Another factor which makes it difficult to be dogmatic about the political alignment of the partiti is that most are located in the southern villages. These communities are reservoirs of industrial labour and are generally strongly pro-Labour. For this reason, unbiased informants generally estimated that Labour supporters made up between half and three-fourths of the membership of all clubs, but that secondary clubs had slightly more. My own experience in Farrug confirms this. I found there that about 70 per cent of the members of each partit are pro-Labour, although the leaders of the village MLP group are almost all from the St. Martin partit. This I suggested was due more to the shallowness of the leadership resources of the St. Roque partit than to the political inclination of its members.

575 621 665 At the policy level, all clubs usually maintain strict political neutrality. At least, all incorporate clauses to this effect in their by-laws, and many prohibit party newspapers and political discussions in the club. Nonetheless, some clubs are closely identified with a particular political party. Of the clubs that are aligned in this way, those that celebrate the titular feasts generally support one of the parties allied with the Church, usually the Nationalist Party; their rivals support the Labour Party. This alignment often comes about when a leading member of a club seeks political office. Where this occurs, members of the opposite festa partit, as a matter of course, give their votes to his chief opponent in another party, or to a rival in his own party. The political significance of the rivalry between festa partiti will be examined in the following chapter, together with some of the ways in which political candidates manipulate the partiti, and are, in their turn, manipulated by them.

But the tendency to political polarity of rival band clubs still does not explain why the leader of a secondary club, for example, supports the Labour Party, and not one of the rival parties. The chief reason for this, quite apart from the fact that he may have a personal preference for the party, is that the members of his own

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

festa partit form the nucleus of his political following. It is not surprising therefore that he should support the party they favour.

There is another interesting way in which festa partiti in general, and secondary partiti in particular, are related to support for the Labour Party. In all villages divided by these partiti, people have become conditioned to opposing the authority of the Church in connection with matters dealing with the celebration of feasts. This, I suggest, has enabled them to accept the anti-clerical outlook of the Labour Party more easily than the people of villages not so divided. An old stone-cutter in Kortin, who was procurator of one of the small chapels in the village, once unconsciously pointed to the structural similarity of the MLP and secondary festa partiti. We were discussing the resemblance of the Strickland crisis of thirty years ago to the present political dispute, when he pointed to the parish church and remarked, 'I've always been against them. I was for Strickland. I'm for Mintoff, and if we had partiti here, I would support the secondary feast.' There is, of course, a difference between the opposition of a secondary partit and that of the MLP. Nonetheless, both oppose the authority of the Church and both resort to attacks on the clergy to drive home their points of view. This is anti-clericalism. Both the festa partiti and the Labour Party make a distinction between the person and the office of the cleric they attack, and they appear to attack the former rather than the latter. But repeated attacks upon the person holding an office may weaken the office itself. Thus prolonged anti-clericalism can lead to anti-religious sentiment, or at least prepare the way for it. This, I feel, has happened in the case of the festa partiti.

In challenging the decisions of the Church relating to matters of festa policy a festa partisan often resorts to violence. He frightens the priest with home-made bombs to show his displeasure, to try and change the decision and even to compel him to leave the village. But he never attacks the ultimate right of the Church or its ministers to make those decisions. Indeed, some friends in Farrug were quite shocked when I suggested that they were doing just this. On the other hand, this constant rebellion against the authority of the Church has accustomed people to being at odds for long periods with their parish priests as well as with the Archbishop. During these times, they often ignore what the Church has to say if it does not agree with the point of view they

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

hold. This is the accepted pattern of behaviour, not only in villages divided by festa partiti, but also in others which have disputes with the Church. But it is only in the villages with festa partiti that these disputes, and the related anti-clerical action, take place on a regularly recurring basis. In these villages, though people are devout in observing many details of their religion, constant opposition to the parish priest in matters connected with festas has led them to look upon a measure of anti-clericalism as part of their way of life.

The relative lack of respect for the clergy in these villages has been partly responsible for a rather high turnover of parish priests. It has been shown how uncomfortable festa partiti can make the life of a parish priest. This, plus the meagre living in the smaller parishes, prompts priests to look for openings in wealthier and less troublesome villages. The Church itself regards the small rural parishes as training or 'stepping-stone parishes', as a monsignor from the Curia once described them to me. But even as such, they are unpopular, and the Archbishop often has difficulty finding priests willing to take charge of them. Farrug, for example, has had six parish priests since 1953. The lack of continuity of Church leadership in these small, divided villages has tended to weaken its influence there and to foster a lack of respect for its authority.

In this social climate the anti-clericalism of the Labour Party fits without great difficulty. Labour supporters have already had experience as festa partisans in ignoring the commands of the Church, and in enduring the taunts and disapproval of their rivals in the other partit. For them anti-clericalism is nothing new, and they are thus not as vulnerable to public opinion and the sanctions of the Church as persons in villages which do not have this tradition of opposition to the Church.

But if there is a certain similarity between the anti-clerical behaviour of many festa enthusiasts and that of MLP supporters, most persons make a distinction between the two. The anti-clerical actions of the festa partiti are usually directed against particular clerics in connection with specific decisions. In contrast, the anti-clericalism of the Labour Party is directed at the Archbishop in particular and often at all priests in general. This difference stems from the fact that basically their challenge to the authority of the Church differs significantly. Where the festa partisan does

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

not rationalize the distinction he makes between the person and the office of the cleric he attacks, though his behaviour shows that he does make one, the Labour supporter often proclaims that he makes such a distinction, when in fact he does not. The MLP not only challenges the statements of the Archbishop which apply to the political scene, but often questions his right to make them. This explains the difference in the reaction of the Church to the two forms of anti-clericalism.

I have suggested that the one prepares the way for the other. The rebellious atmosphere created by the disputes between the festa partiti is, I believe, as important a factor as occupational class in explaining the relatively high degree of open support the Labour Party has in the southern villages. The extent of this support, especially in the smaller villages, in spite of the sanctions of the Church, came as a surprise to some of the leaders of the MLP, who had always thought of them as dominated by their parish priests, like the small villages in Gozo. But in the spring of 1961, the small villages of Kirkop, Dingli and Gudja were placed first, second and third in an MLP competition to find the community which had the greatest proportion of new Party members. I suggest that the support for the MLP in these three villages is due not so much to their proportion of industrial labourers, which in any case is not particularly high (23, 20 and 35 per cent respectively),[1] as to their strong tradition of rebellion against the authority of the Church. Kirkop and Gudja both have active festa partiti of long standing, and while Dingli has no festa partiti now, the village has a long history of opposition to its parish priests. For example, shortly after the First World War, the Dingli Social Club had an argument with the parish priest, and for many years after, members celebrated the national feast on 8 September, instead of the patronal feast of the Assumption, simply to annoy him.

V

But whatever complex and diverse reasons people have for taking sides, the division has given rise to conflict in most villages. In this respect Kortin is no different, as the slogans displayed during the battle of the blackboards indicated. The division has cut right

[1] *1957 Census: Report on Economic Activities*, pp. 41–2.

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

178 across the village and the clubs, and has brought about conflict within many families. People lament the change that has come 578 over the village as a result. An old bachelor friend often used to 621 complain that had we come to live there just a few years ago, 'before politics came and spoiled everything', we would have found the village a far happier place. Picnics and outings were more frequent then, and groups of friends used to gather on hot summer evenings and stroll outside the village to play guitars and sing the lilting Maltese *ghana* in the cool air away from the houses. [575] There was also more life in the clubs. Both the Social Club and [796] the Band Club used to take part in the national carnival competition for the best decorated carts and costumed companies. But as the political conflict has divided the island's carnival celebration in two, so it has also affected the clubs. They now celebrate neither the government's carnival nor that of the MLP for fear the question of which one to participate in would provoke a fight that would cripple the club.

578 Dun Bert, the parish priest in Kortin, is of course the head of 665 the local group which supports the Archbishop and opposes the 793 MLP. His chief lieutenants in the fight are the local clergy and the 794 lay leaders of the religious associations. Pawlu and Anton, his two faithful helpers, are also vocal partisans, as is old Manwel. Dr. Farrugia, old Manwel's son, as a former member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) and a leading member of one of the political parties opposed to the MLP, also belongs to the pro-Church division in the village, though he takes little part in its day-to-day affairs. The main activity and support comes from the leaders of 275 the lay associations, especially of the Young Christian Workers, 578 the MUSEUM and the Sodality of Our Lady. These all meet regu- 665 larly in their respective premises. Many of the others, older men, 794 spend much of their free time in Kelinu's café. These include old Manwel, Pawlu, Anton, the sacristan, the organist, and Dun Mikiel and Dun Filip, respectively the chaplains of the female and male sections of Catholic Action. This café, located right next to Dr. Farrugia's house, is the nicest café on the square, or in the village for that matter. It is the only one which the clergy, the teachers and occasionally Dr. Farrugia himself, frequent. It is thus the headquarters of the more influential village citizens who support the Archbishop. Most MLP supporters have stopped going to [517] it, although a few still play cards there for an hour or so in the late afternoon when they return from work.

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

afternoon when they return from work. Many Labour sympathizers believe that the important anti-Labour demonstrations and moves are plotted at Kelinu's.

The headquarters of the MLP group is the Labour Club, which is situated just off the square and around the corner from Kelinu's. Salvu, the ex-MLA who is the leader of the village Labour group, spends his evenings there with his lieutenants, the officers of the village Labour Committee. Salvu, a small building contractor, has had little formal education, but he has an engaging personality, a quick mind and is a persuasive speaker. He is also an excellent comic actor, a playwright of sorts, and the author of most of the slogans that appear on the club's blackboard. Smaller groups of Labour supporters meet at one of the other cafés on the square, and at some of the wine shops near the chapel of St. Paul in the poorer section of the village. Other groups of pro-Labour friends often gather on the steps of the church or around a bench near the Labour club. They rarely go into the club itself, for all are anxious to avoid being marked as open Labour supporters by the village, which, generally speaking, is strongly anti-Labour.

The supporters of the Archbishop and those of the Labour Party rarely meet face to face as organized bodies. When they do, it is the occasion for a good deal of ill-feeling and, sometimes, open hostility. This occurs when a big rally is organized in the village. Two such rallies were held in Kortin while we were living there. The first was on the occasion of a visit of the Archbishop; the second was a national MLP meeting. Dun Bert and his assistants organized a huge demonstration in honour of the Archbishop during his visit. It was a great success. The Labour club arranged a social and musical gathering the evening before to work up Party solidarity, but it closed its doors during the actual visit and cleaned off its blackboard in order not to provoke incidents. With but one exception, there were no incidents to spoil the enthusiastic welcome the villagers accorded the Archbishop. Many Labour supporters attended the demonstration, for the Archbishop was visiting the village as head of the Church in Malta to bestow the sacrament of confirmation on the children. But as the Archbishop and his excited escort approached the church, a bitter Labour supporter made an insulting gesture at him. (People were quick to inform us that the man was an outsider married into the village.) He was subsequently arrested and convicted, for as

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

578 665 673 688 694 already noted, in Malta, it is a criminal offence to insult a minister of religion. There were no other disturbances.

The Labour rally was rather a different story. The leader of the MLP and the thousands of his supporters who came to Kortin to hear him speak received a decidedly hostile reception. Though 578 665 794 Dun Bert did not organize a counter-demonstration for the occasion, he did arrange a mass protest meeting the evening before. The following day rival groups were out decorating. A number of MUSEUM lads under the direction of one of the older members pasted anti-MLP slogans all over the façade of the church. At the same time, a group of men were busy hanging posters and flags from the Labour club to welcome Dom Mintoff to the village.

At 4 p.m. buses and cars began to stream into the village with [796] thousands of MLP supporters from all over the island. At about the same time the church bells began to call the faithful to a religious procession in honour of Our Lady of Fatima which Dun Bert had scheduled to take place during the Labour meeting. He himself stood in the square watching the faithful gather in the church. He also carefully observed those who passed by on their way to the Labour meeting, which was being held right behind the church. Most of the villagers who sympathized with the Labour Party but who did not support it openly did not attend the meeting. [783] They were anxious to avoid the open break with the rest of the community which attending would have entailed. Besides, several mentioned that their confessors had told them that they would commit a mortal sin if they attended MLP meetings. All the open supporters of the MLP in the village went to the meeting.

[796] The meeting began at about 4.30 p.m. and lasted for two hours. Shortly after it had started, Dun Bert's procession of nearly a thousand men, women and children slowly wound its way through the village and returned to the church for a period of prayer and worship. When the Labour meeting finally broke up, most of the outside supporters departed quickly, though a number were delayed because villagers had deflated the tyres of about 578 a dozen of their cars. At this time people also began to leave the 625 church. But the police, who were trying to keep a passage clear in 665 the centre of the square for the stream of departing Labour sup- 794 porters, kept them on the steps of the church. They waited there for a while and then began singing hymns and songs in honour of

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

the Pope and the Archbishop, stopping now and then to shout insults at the passing Labour supporters. The square on the other side of the police cordon began to fill up with people returning from the meeting and others who left their houses to see what the excitement was about. Gradually the songs became louder and more excited, and the shouts hoarser. By then it was getting quite dark, but I could see Dun Mikiel in the front row, his hands thrust tensely into the pockets of his cassock, scowling at the passers-by while he smoked cigarette after cigarette. The tension by this time was almost electric. Suddenly, one of the local MLP supporters returning to the Labour club replied to a taunt by making a threatening gesture. The crowd in front of the church booed him loudly and surged forward. The police, anxious to hurry the trouble-maker off the square, pushed him a bit too hard and he stumbled and fell. This angered the crowd on the other side of the square and it began to press through the police cordon. At this point police reinforcements arrived and cleared the square in a few moments. Their prompt action prevented an ugly situation from going further, for there had been well over a thousand angry people facing each other, separated by less than two dozen unarmed policemen.

Four days after the meeting, Dun Bert organized a pilgrimage of reparation to atone for the insults of the MLP speakers. The procession of some 1,200 people reciting the Rosary escorted the statue of Our Lady of Sorrows through the area behind the church where the Labour meeting had been held. About 400 of the participants were outsiders who had come to Kortin from other parts of the island for the occasion. After the procession the crowd gathered in front of the church where a Mass was said. A noted Jesuit orator then rebutted the MLP speeches point by point. The whole affair had almost passed off without incident when a number of stones and bottles were thrown from behind walls at the buses and cars leaving the village.

But if there are relatively few face-to-face meetings of this kind in Kortin or elsewhere, there are many disputes that divide and weaken the clubs and associations. This matter has particularly affected Sur Gorg, the president of the Social Club, who feels responsible for preserving its unity in these difficult times. In Kelinu's, where many of the influential regulars are members of the Social Club, they say that it has become a Mintoff stronghold.

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

Many of them have stopped going there. In point of fact, Sur Gorġ and the secretary are strongly opposed to the Labour Party, though many of the younger men and some of the most active older members support it. A number of people living nearby have complained that members praise Mintoff in loud voices. There is growing pressure on Sur Gorġ to ban all political conversation there. He has so far resisted the pressure, for he believes that if he were to give in, he would drive away the very members who form the backbone of the club. His chief problem, as he described it to me, is how to focus the attention of the members on something other than politics. He is therefore doing his best to obtain the permits necessary to open the theatre for which they have been planning and saving for years. He feels that in the excitement of building, the members will forget their political differences and reunite, and thus the club will pass safely through this crisis. But the permits have been slow in coming and meanwhile the pressure on him is building up. Two important members of the committee have already resigned, 'under the influence of those busy-bodies in Kelinu's', as some members described it.

The men in charge of the St. Martin Band Club in Farrug face much the same problem. As has already been noted, most of the leaders of the two political blocs in the village are members of the St. Martin club, and several of them are on its committee. This difference of political loyalty often provokes quarrels over matters of policy. During the centenary, for example, the committee were sharply divided over whether to salute the Archbishop with the customary barrage of fireworks when he entered the village to take part in the ceremony. The matter was put to a vote, and the MLP faction won. The disgruntled losers began talking about firing off their own salute of welcome. But the crisis that this action would have brought about was avoided when the Vicar-General officiated in place of the Archbishop, who was indisposed. As the MLP supporters had nothing against him, he received the full barrage of aerial bombs and fire crackers. The rift was thus healed, and all joined in to celebrate a rousing feast.

The following year the festa again brought a crisis with it. This time it was a far more serious one. Most of the young Labour supporters, in retaliation for the way the Church had attacked their party and its leaders, flatly refused to have anything to do with the feast. These young men included virtually all the partit's

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

fireworkers, and without their expert help it was feared that the feast would be a miserable failure. Many Labour supporters also instructed their parents and wives not to contribute money to the feast. This depressing state of affairs continued for some time.

Then one day, about three months before the festa, Pietru, the young schoolteacher who is head of Catholic Action and treasurer of the St. Martin club, came up to me looking very pleased. He said that the feast was saved. Several events had combined to work up interest in it. It seems that most of the people had attended a large and very successful titular festa in a neighbouring village; the St. Roque fireworkers had shot off three extremely well-made test rockets; and he himself had played his tape recording of the St. Martin hymn, the anthem of the partit, over a loud-speaker in the square. These events revived interest in the festa and in the reputation of the partit. Immediately afterwards the secretary of the club, a Labour supporter who has set politics aside for the honour of the partit, called a committee meeting to discuss the problem of making fireworks. After several speeches urging members to keep their politics from spoiling the feast, the committee voted to make fireworks. Though two skilled fire-workers crossed the floor and agreed to help, none of the many experts among the rank and file followed suit. But soon after this political loyalty again began to smother the rekindled partit spirit, and one of the fireworkers all but dropped out. Moreover, Pietru, who is the village's most eloquent and outspoken enemy of the Labour Party, began to preach so vehemently to those he calls the 'lost sheep' of the club, that he antagonized many. His fund-raising suffered as a result.

About a month after this I met Toni at a festa in a neighbouring village, and we had a long talk away from the interested eyes and ears of Farrug. Toni has been a member of the St. Martin Club committee for nearly twenty years, and until some months ago had been vice president. He was clearly very worried about the club. People were already beginning to draw parallels between the present situation and the events that led up to the split in 1930. He said he was doing his best to discourage such talk, and had now begun working hard to avoid an open break.

He pointed out that he had experienced many crises in the partit and favoured a less blunt approach to winning back the interest of the MLP members than did the crusading Pietru. He felt that he

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

had already had some success wooing members back on a personal basis by talking only of the honour of the partit and leaving politics out altogether. He stressed that the main problem was not so much the feast but the survival of the club. 'If we can just weather out the storm until after the election we can save it.' He went on to describe how it had taken years to heal the division after the seceding Strickland supporters had rejoined in 1935. 'We must avoid a split at all costs, and the only way we can do that is to bury our political differences.' His technique for doing this was to have as few formal committee meetings as possible, to avoid discussing controversial subjects and to vote in secret, for in these times 'an open vote divides the members'.

The wise counsel and efforts of the older members, who have set politics aside, has so far kept the younger hot-heads from splitting the club. In spite of all the obstacles in its way, the feast of St. Martin turned out to be a good show. Though many supporters did not contribute, others gave more than usual and there were enough funds for a good feast. About a dozen boys worked under the direction of the two adult fireworkers, and made most of the fireworks. They gave a very good account of themselves, though not one of them is old enough (18) to join the club as a formal member. All are Catholic Action members. In fact, except for a few St. Roque boys, they are the only ones left in the society. The Catholic Action group once numbered almost fifty. The others, the sons of Labour families, had been forced out by the vote of loyalty to the Archbishop which the association's national headquarters had demanded. But their enthusiasm could not quite make up for their youth or their lack of numbers. During the Friday demonstration for the saint some outsiders who were supporters of the guest band had to help them carry the statue of their patron part of the way. This was a great comedown from the previous year, when his followers were so numerous that they had to struggle for a turn to carry him. But the noise and the gay atmosphere of the celebration rekindled the interest of a number of the Labour supporters. Several helped to erect the decorations on Saturday; a few even joined in one of the band matches.

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

VI

It is of course an open question how much longer the intense partit spirit can survive in the face of the political division now cutting across all festa partiti. In Farrug the division between the festa partiti, such a strong force in the past, is now of less importance as a principle of social organization than the rivalry between the supporters and opponents of the MLP. The relative importance in Farrug, as everywhere, of this latter division is directly related to the intensity of the conflict at the national level between the MLP and the Church. If it decreases, so will that at the village level. But the longer it lasts, the more difficult it will be to remove it completely from the social scene. Both the Church and the Labour Party, through their respective societies, committees and social clubs, are building up an institutional framework that is incorporating this political opposition on a permanent basis in all villages. This is taking place in much the same way as the confraternities and social clubs a hundred years ago made permanent the conflict between rival factions competing over the celebration of saints.

The rivalry between the Church and the MLP, as well as that between competing political parties, reflects the increasing involvement of the villager in the political life of his country. It was perhaps only due to Malta's peculiar position as a colony and an island fortress, a role which effectively prevented the development of an active internal political life of the more conventional kind, that competition over church privileges and saints was able to assume the importance it has. It is not surprising that the changing nature of Malta's strategic and constitutional position should alter the tempo and character of its internal political life. In the villages, this change is reflected in the weakening of the festa partiti by national political issues.

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

653 Another very important function the Local Committees per-
665 formed during the period the MLP was in power was to obtain improvements for the village. Requests for drainage, new roads, street lighting and, above all, new schools, were submitted to the District Committees. There the proposals were screened and given priority ratings by the committee members and the district MLA's. When these projects were implemented, and a large number were, the Local Committees naturally received credit for them. This added to their claim to represent their villages, and strengthened the formal structure of the party.

647 This system of handling patronage and complaints gave the
662 villager a direct contact with authority. It was a fairly simple
665 procedure, and many considered it reasonably impartial, though of course it did help to be a member of the Labour Party in good standing. Moreover, the complainant, even though he might not succeed in his cause, had the satisfaction that it had received attention, and it did not cost him a nice fat rabbit. This does not
578 mean that there was no abuse. Civil servants complained that they
647 were often intimidated by zealous MLP members who threatened
66 to report them to their Ministers if they did not comply as requested. This friction was particularly keen between the Local Committee members and the village police, street sweepers and teachers. One head teacher I knew was particularly bitter about his caretaker, who was a member of the village MLP committee. The caretaker would stroll into the head teacher's office if he disagreed with the disciplining of a child, for example, and threaten to report him to the Minister if he did not lighten the punishment.

647 But on the whole, the MLP made a concerted effort to take
665 patronage out of the hands of canvassers and MLA's alike and chan-
662 nel it through the various committees of the party apparatus. This not only strengthened the party, it also won it considerable popularity. Moreover, it relieved MLA's and Ministers of a heavy administrative load; they were only called in on the more complicated matters. In short, the Local Committees came to function as branches of the government.

When the Labour Government resigned in 1958, the MLP clubs and committees lost the influence they had with government. They once more became merely propaganda and social centres. But the role they had played for three years in representing the interests of government at the village level and in

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

forwarding the requests and complaints of the villagers to government had greatly increased their strength, and that of the party they represented. As the members operated as a formal committee and not as individuals, they had the esteem and respect of most of the community. They also had considerable power in local affairs. In fact, for three years the leaders of the Labour group in the village ranked alongside the parish priest and the professionals as the most prominent and influential citizens of the village. The canvassers of the rival parties had perhaps had power, but they had never had respect. Theirs was always rather an underhanded operation, that was often disowned by MLA's when they were confronted with it. The MLP, on the other hand, delegated responsibility to Local Committees, and the Ministers legitimized them by openly working through them in all their relations with the villages. Villagers were also openly encouraged to work through them. These committees thus served the ends of the Labour Party most successfully. It is quite likely, therefore, that in the future other parties will find it politically as well as administratively expedient to develop and work through village committees patterned on the model so successfully tested by the Labour Party.

The party system has come into direct conflict with the traditional relations between patron and client at relatively few points. This is largely because most patrons who desired to were able to move successfully into the new field of party politics. A notable exception are priests, who are no longer permitted by their Bishops to stand for national political office. Their power to influence authority has thus been weakened by the new source of patronage and influence open to their parishioners. In particular, parish priests came into open conflict with the village MLP committees during the Labour Party's time in power after 1955. Not surprisingly, their clash at the village level mirrored the dispute between the Archbishop and the MLP at the national level. That is, it was a conflict between the religious authority of the Church and the secular authority of the State, represented in the villages by the Local Committees of the Labour Party. Both the parish priest and the Local Committee claimed to represent the village, and both sought by mobilizing their supporters to advance their claim at the expense of their opponents. This invariably resulted in a struggle for power during which the Labour supporters were

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

accused of being anti-clerical and against the Church because they opposed the will of the parish priest.

Shortly after Mintoff took office, the Local Committee in Kortin made plans to open a new avenue into the village. The scheme, first projected by government planners over sixty years before, was designed to ease the flow of traffic through the village and provide a wide, tree-lined promenade leading to the main square in front of the church. Unfortunately, the project required the demolition of four buildings, two of which were small chapels used as warehouses for the festa decorations. Because of this Dun Bert, the parish priest, bitterly opposed the scheme, as had his predecessors. He claimed that most of the village supported him. The Labour Committee, on the other hand, felt that it had the backing of the village, and went ahead with the project. The road was finally opened, and it proved to be a great success. But the two small churches were destroyed, and the relations between the Labour group and the parish priest remained hostile. Six years later, Dun Bert and his supporters were still pointing to the avenue as positive proof that the Labour Party is fundamentally opposed to the Church.

IV

But if the political parties have modified the traditional system of patronage somewhat by providing a new channel of influence for the villager, the professional politician of today is by and large the same traditional patron. That is, the successful politicians are largely drawn from the professional classes; they are still the doctors, the lawyers, the architects and the chemists. Indeed, until recently the lists of candidates often read like directories of the professional classes. This situation prevailed until about the time of the Labour Party split in 1949, when virtually all the professional class Labour MLA's sided with Dr. Boffa and formed the Workers' Party, while most of the MLP Executive and the rank and file supported Mintoff. After this the Labour Party asked people from all classes to stand as candidates, and began to push up working-class leaders trained in union and club politics. But the politicians from the professional class still heavily outnumber their working-class colleagues, even in the Labour Party.

Table 8 below illustrates this. Of the fifty MLA's elected in the

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

557 662 666 does not rest easily until he has repaid it. This is as true of corporate groups such as the band clubs as it is of individuals Frequently the financial circumstances of the client, or the very nature of the favour, make it difficult or impossible for him to meet his obligation. His vote, and those of his family, provide the logical and accepted means to this end. This extends the relationship between patron and client to include that between politician and constituent.

66 Candidates who do not have the professional qualifications or high status necessary to recruit a following in this way are at a disadvantage. This is especially true for many of the Labour Party candidates, whose education and social standing at times compare unfavourably with those of their rivals. It was principally to overcome this handicap that the Labour Party sought to strengthen the party at the expense of individual candidates. It did this by limiting the system of political patronage which prevailed under previous governments and curbing the influence of the canvassers. In fact, the MLP officially forbade its candidates to employ canvassers. (Though, of course, many candidates have informal canvassers in their friends, relatives and clients.) At the same time, the party directed its propaganda at building up the image of the party and its leader. Labour supporters were constantly urged to vote for the party and not for individuals. By and large its campaign has been most successful. Its sympathizers not only vote for candidates who do not conform to the traditional image of the professional patron-politician, but they also vote across class lines, i.e. the teacher voting for an ex-dockyard fitter.

● 578 621 65 666 All candidates have to take into account the parochial rivalries which often cut across their districts. This is particularly true of the rivalry between the festa partiti. It has been noted that there is often a political polarity between festa partiti in the same village, and that sometimes the rivalry is so strong that partisans vote against a political party simply because a leading member of the rival partit is a candidate for it. But the number of people who place loyalty to their festa partit before support of a political party is declining. Nonetheless, if parochial rivalry no longer determines which party will get the votes, it very often decides which of the candidates within the party will. Many people have assured me that it is almost unheard of for a member of a festa partit to vote for a member of the rival partit, even though both support the

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

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same political party. Thus a politician who is also a leading member of a festa partit always asks a rival candidate from his party to come to his village and canvass the party votes from the opposite festa partit.

621 66

Most people believe that politicians trade promises to assist festa partiti in return for votes. One well-known Labour politician who is the leader of the secondary festa partit in his own village, made such a promise to gain the support of a neighbouring secondary partit that was facing eviction. In return for the votes of the partit, he offered to introduce a bill into the Legislative Assembly which would prevent landlords from evicting band clubs. The proposition appealed to the partit and the bill, which [671] gained a great deal of support for the Labour Party from other clubs as well, became law.[1] In fact, it was one of the first laws the MLP enacted after it was returned to office in 1955. Partly as a result of his promise of assistance, but also because of his keen interest in the problems of secondary festa partiti, this candidate became so identified with this neighbouring partit that he had to ask MLP candidates from the other side of the electoral district to bid for the Labour votes of the members of the opposite partit. He naturally asked them to canvass the Labour votes of the titular partit in his own village as well.

But perhaps the most famous case of this kind, and certainly the most conspicuous, took place in Gozo. For many years the supporters of the Leone partit in Rabat had been embarrassed by the fact that the statue of their beloved patron could not be taken in processions from the cathedral. There was simply no way for her to pass through the walls of the old citadel in which the cathedral was situated. The members of the partit wished to remedy this by breaching the wall and making a large gate, but the Antiquities Board strongly opposed the idea. Finally, an ambitious MLP candidate came to their rescue. He is alleged to have promised them help if they voted for him. Whether the deal for votes is true I do not know. I do know, however, that the politician was elected and succeeded in having a huge new gate torn in the historic citadel. That he did this at public expense, against the orders of his [626] Ministers and in defiance of the Antiquities Board, is evidence of his ingenuity and single-mindedness. Of course, it might also have

[1] Act V, 1955: 'An Act to Amend the Reletting of Urban Property (Regulation) Ordinance.'

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

to switch to the party with best chance of success, for they know that if he is elected, he will channel patronage to them, often at the expense of the rest of his electoral district.

This system of voting also encourages contests between candidates from the same party. Such contests, carried out in public and in the heat of a campaign, often create hostility among the leaders of the party, and weaken its solidarity.

Finally, because this proportional system makes it possible for popular minority candidates to be elected, it encourages dissident factions to hive off from the major parties and found new ones. This seriously weakens the parent parties. Thus, although the only political division of real importance is that between the supporters of the Archbishop and those who favour Mintoff, there are now six political parties in Malta. It is not surprising therefore that the minority parties, and Miss Strickland's Progressive Constitutional Party in particular, are strongly in favour of retaining the present electoral system. Without it they would not be represented. The Malta Labour Party, which favours a strong two-party system, would prefer to see substituted an electoral system which would eliminate the smaller parties and strengthen the major parties. The Nationalist Party, although it would benefit from a change in the electoral system which would eliminate many of its rivals, has remained relatively silent on this point. This is because most of its leading members are patron-politicians of the old school. They owe their political life and the influence they command to the electoral system which has enabled them to build their own personal political organizations. The Nationalist Party is a party of respected and influential men, but in their strength lies its weakness. It is a party of politicians, rather than a politician's party. Dr. Borg Olivier, the Nationalist Prime Minister, is a first among equals; he does not lead his party in the sense that Mintoff leads the Malta Labour Party.

In short the Maltese system of proportional representation facilitates the emergence of minority parties. It also weakens the major parties by promoting intra-party rivalry and helping to keep alive the tradition of local patron-politicians. These factors militate against the development of a strong central government. It can be argued forcefully that Malta, which is facing a critical period in its economic and constitutional development, is now in greater need of a strong central government than ever before. It

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

none of these things. This study of village politics has thus been largely concerned with parish politics. In this field the Church is the arbiter of all issues of policy. It is therefore the authority that hands down decisions on matters which concern the community; it is also the authority against which disappointed petitioners rebel.

II

At the national level, the picture is similar. Since the Church for so long has represented the interests of a solidly Catholic people *vis-à-vis* the State, it has always exercised considerable influence, if not authority, in matters of national policy. Hence some groups have often disagreed with its decisions. Both during the late 'twenties and early 'thirties and more recently, political parties have rebelled against its authority. Their rebellions have given rise to conflicts that have divided the country.

Though the Maltese do not regard this conflict as permanent, it would seem from its recurrence during Malta's only two periods of sustained representative government that it is, in fact, inherent in the social system. That is, it has followed almost inevitably upon the introduction of elected government into a society linked as closely with the Church as Malta is. Issues of national policy, which in countries where the Church is not such an integral part of society would be regarded as purely political and devoid of religious content, in Malta become matters on which the Church feels obliged to make known its views. Disputes arise when the views of a political party differ from those held by the Church. The party then accuses the Church of interfering in politics, and is in turn charged by the Church with being anti-clerical. Political issues become religious ones, or, seen from another point of view, religious ones become political. But in the dispute which follows, people from all walks of life are forced to make a choice between Church and political party. The resulting conflict divides the islands into bitterly opposed factions.

The persistence of this conflict, of course, is partly dependent upon the continuing survival of a political party at variance with the Church. In the past this was Strickland's Constitutional Party; at present it is the Malta Labour Party; in the future it may be yet another. The conflict which divided the country thirty years ago diminished after Strickland made peace with the Church; it

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

disappeared when the old Constitutional Party died out in the long period of Governor's rule and the war that followed. At present, however, the MLP shows no signs of weakening. On the contrary, it is as tightly united and strong today as it has ever been. Thus this conflict will in all probability continue to divide Malta and Gozo in the foreseeable future, though its intensity may fluctuate.

It is well to remember that this study was carried out at a time when the hostility between these two camps was at its peak. Some of the examples that have been given, therefore, are extreme cases which would have been quite inconceivable even ten years ago. It is also possible that ten years hence they will appear equally strange. But this does not detract from the relevance of the analysis, for if the examples given are ephemeral, the principles which they illustrate are permanent.

III

In many respects the rebellion of a political party against the authority of the Bishop is similar to that of a festa partit against its parish priest. There is an important difference, however; the festa partit can appeal an unfavourable decision of its parish priest to the Archbishop. If the latter rules against the partit, it can bring pressure to bear that may result in the transfer of the parish priest. A political party, on the other hand, cannot appeal the unfavourable decisions of the Bishop to any local authority, for in his diocese his word is law. Though in theory such disputes can be referred to the Holy See, in practice, as in the case of Strickland's conflict with the Church, they fester for so long that by the time Rome is brought in reconciliation is difficult, if not impossible. If in practice a political party cannot appeal to a higher authority, it can even less agitate for the replacement of the Bishop. Thus disputes remain unresolved and the supporters of the political party become progressively more anti-clerical. Finally, their anti-clericalism is equated with anti-Catholicism, and their rebellion against authority with revolt against the social order.

But is it in fact a revolution? It is important to draw a clear distinction between rebellion and revolution.[1] In the case of the former, people may turn against a leader personally, and may

[1] Cf. Max Gluckman, *Custom and Conflict in Africa* (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1959), p. 28.

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

even try to remove him from office. But they do not attack the office itself. In contrast, a revolution aims at changing not only the office-holder, but also the nature of the office and the social order in which it functions. Though the Malta Labour Party has strongly criticized the Archbishop and the clergy, often in insulting language, for their refusal to endorse its integration scheme, and, later, its demands for independence, it has never suggested that the office of archbishop should be abolished or the Church suppressed. The Church, however, attacks Mintoff as though he were bent on overthrowing the established social order in general, and the Catholic Church in particular. The extremely severe sanctions that it has directed against the MLP and its leaders reflect this point of view.

There is a very real danger that this strong medicine may kill the patient, for there is evidence that the MLP's anti-clericalism is in fact becoming anti-Catholicism, and the rebellion a revolt against the Church. Some of the more extreme, educated Labour supporters are showing a growing interest in the ideologies of countries which have fought successful battles against the Church. Though the great majority of the Labour supporters would still like to be devout Catholics, a small but increasing number are beginning to question the social order. As one remarked to me, 'I'm regarded as a Communist by my neighbours and the Church, which denies me its sacraments. Have I anything to lose by becoming one?' Though Communist literature rarely finds its way into Malta, since it is illegal to send it in the mails, a number of persons have begun to listen regularly to Radio Moscow. A few are even discussing the possibility of joining another church.

IV

But in spite of this bitter conflict, Maltese villages are still tightly united communities, life goes on and the social order does not disintegrate. Considering everything, there has been relatively little open violence between the supporters of the Church and the Labour Party. If occasionally there was some, it was most often caused by or directed against outsiders, either those who married into the villages, or who were imported for some special occasion from other villages. The battle between the Gozitans and the Maltese Labour supporters was an extreme case of this kind. But

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

there have been remarkably few of the overtly hostile attacks, common when feste partiti are registering disagreement. What accounts for the qualitative difference in the violence between the groups involved in these two types of conflict? What prevents the national political conflict from degenerating into widespread violence, from destroying normal relations, thus making shambles of the social order? Is it merely the presence of a large, efficient police force?

In point of fact, there are many institutions and ties that operate to exert pressure on the opponents to reach a settlement, and so prevent the dispute from destroying the social system. The most important of the factors that inhibit the spread of conflict is the existence of persons whose loyalties are divided between the conflicting sides. Such persons have a vested interest in the maintenance of peace and limitation of the area of conflict.[1]

The considerable difference between the disputes of feste partiti with the Church, and the conflict between the Church and the Labour Party, has been stressed. The disputes involving feste partiti are localized, their course is highly formalized, there are acknowledged peace-makers: they are clearly rebellions in the sense that Gluckman uses. These disputes are also tightly circumscribed by customary safeguards which keep them from spreading and channel them through set stages until they have been resolved. It is patterned action which, in spite of its occasional violence, does not threaten the position of the Church. In contrast, the conflict between the MLP and the Church is not localized, it is not circumscribed by a body of custom which keeps it from spreading, and there are no acknowledged peace-makers who can mediate between the disputants. Not only is it inherent, it is irresoluble. There is an air of revolt about it and if it were allowed to run to the violence of some of the clashes between feste partiti and the Church, it could throw the country into civil war. The violence of the feste partiti does not threaten the social order, that between supporters of the Church and the MLP would.

What keeps the conflict from becoming more violent are the thousands of persons who have their allegiances divided between the Church and the Labour Party. All these people work to keep the conflict from spreading, if not actually to make peace. Who are they? They are the countless persons whose families have been

[1] *Ibid., passim.*

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

divided by the conflict, the office-holders who have laid politics aside to preserve the unity of the clubs for which they are responsible, the many who have sought to avoid open commitments to either side, and to remain in contact with both. They are the people who, in spite of all that has been preached and said against them by both sides, still look to both the Archbishop and Mintoff as their leaders, the one in the religious sphere, the other in the political. They see nothing inconsistent in hanging pictures of the two side by side in their houses. All have a vested interest in peace; and all work in their own way to keep the conflict from spreading and destroying completely their customary way of life.

At one time the entire civil service worked to prevent the spread of conflict in much the same way. When the Labour Party took over the government many civil servants, forced by the nature of their office to carry out the orders of the party in power, were obliged to administer policies which were contrary to the declared interests of the Church. Their loyalties were thus often divided between the two. Some of the higher civil servants carried messages between the two sides. Others called at the Curia merely to assure the Church that they implemented unwillingly the controversial policies. Yet others acted quietly in their own various ways to reduce the tension between government and Church that made their own positions so uncomfortable. Civil servants at all levels thus worked to keep the Church and the Labour Government in touch with each other and exerted considerable pressure to prevent the relations between the two from deteriorating even more. But their conciliatory influence came to an end when the Labour Party resigned. It is not surprising, therefore, that with the removal of this bridge between the MLP and the Church, the conflict became more intense almost immediately.

The two sides are now linked together only by the many persons with conflicting allegiances. Yet their ability to keep the conflict from spreading is slowly being reduced by the uncompromising position of the Church which is forcing them to take sides openly. As these persons reluctantly do so, the important cross links that tie the two combatants together are snapped off one by one, and the conflict becomes progressively more intense.

• 2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

V

578 665 795 What of the future? It would seem likely that the present conflict will continue. The dispute between the Church and the Labour Party has become institutionalized in many villages through their respective associations and social clubs. The major political activity at the village level will thus most likely continue to be a reflection of that at the national level. It will be a dispute between those who wish to preserve the identity of the village as a parish, with the dependence upon the Church that it implies, and the secular elements who wish to establish the village as a political unit apart from the Church. But there will also be other conflicting groups, such as the festa partiti, which will continue to manipulate this political division to their own advantage. The leader of one of the secondary festa partiti indicated to me how this may take place. He was discussing the recent attempts of the Association of Secondary Feasts to increase the scale of its members' feasts, and concluded by remarking, 'If the Archbishop doesn't increase our feast this year, ninety per cent of the club will vote for Mintoff in the coming election.' Thus in the future, as in the past, the Church will continue to be one of the central actors in the drama of Maltese village politics.

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2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

[p.141]

Appendix A

Festa and Band Club Partiti

	Titular Feast	*Band Club*	*Secondary Feast*	*Band Club*
A. FESTA AND BAND CLUB RIVALRY				
GHAXAQ	The Assumption	'St. Mary'	St. Joseph	'St. Joseph'
GUDJA[1]	O/L of the Rosary	'La Stella'	O/L of Consolation	'O/L of Consolation'
KIRKOP	St. Leonard	'St. Leonard'	St. Joseph	'St. Joseph'
LUQA	St. Andrew	'St. Andrew'	O/L of Consolation	'Union'
MQABBA	The Assumption	'King George V'	O/L of the Lily	'Lily'
QRENDI	The Assumption	'St. Mary'	O/L of Lourdes	'Lourdes'
RABAT	St. Paul	'Count Roger'	St. Joseph[2] (Franciscans)	'L'Isle Adam'
VITTORIOSA	St. Lawrence	'Duke of Edinburgh'	St. Dominic[2] (Dominicans)	'Prince of Wales'
ŻEBBUĠ	St. Philip	'St. Philip' 'St. Philip's Festivities and Social Club'	St. Joseph	'De Rohan'
ŻURRIEQ	St. Catherine	'St. Catherine'	O/L of Mount Carmel	'Queen Victoria'
B. INTER PARISH AND BAND CLUB RIVALRY				
QORMI	St. George	'St. George'	St. Sebastian	'Pinto'
RABAT, GOZO	The Assumption	'Leone'	St. George	'La Stella'
SLIEMA	Stella Maris	'Stella Maris'	Sacred Heart	'Sliema'
VALLETTA	St. Paul	'La Vallette'	St. Dominic[2] (Dominicans)	'King's Own'

[176]

[1] Both saints are secondary; the titular is the Assumption of Our Lady.
[2] The devotion is centred on a church in the parish that is run by regular clergy. The rivalry is thus classified midway between A and B.
[3] Though this is the main feast, the titular of the parish is Our Lady of Porto Salvo.

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

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C. BAND CLUB RIVALRY ONLY

BIRKIRKARA	St. Helen	'St. Helen'	X	'Duke of Connaught'
HAMRUN	St. Gajetan	'St. Gajetan'	X	'St. Joseph'
MELLIEHA	Nativity of Our Lady	'La Vittoria'	X	'Imperial'
ŻABBAR[1]	O/L of Grace	'Maria M. Gratiae'	(St. Michael)	'St. Michael'
ŻEJTUN	St. Catherine	'Beland'	X	'Żejtun'

D. FESTA RIVALRY EXISTED FORMERLY

BALZAN	The Annunciation	'St. Gabriel'	St. Valentine	X
DINGLI	The Assumption	X	National Feast on September 8	'Dingli Club'[2]
GHARGHUR	St. Bartholomew	'St. Bartholomew'[2]	St. Joseph	X
LIJA	Transfiguration of Our Lord	'Pius X'	St. Aloysius	X
NAXXAR	Nativity of Our Lady	'Peace'	O/L of Doctrine	X
SAFI	The Conversion of St. Paul	'St. Paul'[2]	O/L of the Rosary	X
SIĠĠIEWI	St. Nicholas	'St. Nicholas'	St. Joseph	X

[1] The external feast of the secondary saint was suppressed.
[2] Social and festa club without a band.

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This type of core area therefore, as defined in these examples is the basic pattern in all villages throughout Malta and Gozo.

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In a consideration of the present scene within the Maltese village it is essential to be aware, at all stages of the argument, of the evolution of the settlements concerned. In the Żurrieq case it is clear that the main village block is extending in several directions, notably northward past the school and south-westward towards the small hamlet of Migret. This latter is already linked by a continuous built-up stretch to the main village and thus contrasts with Bubaqra which remains morphologically independent. In the case of some of the larger villages, Żebbuġ and Żejtun are two notable examples, the completion of this kind of merging of nuclei accounts for present intra-village sectionalism. Thus Żebbuġ (Malta) is a compound of three ancient village nuclei, Hal Muxi, Hal Mula and Hal Dwieli. The very title of 'Hal', or 'village', still given to these parts of what is now a single village reflects their original separate independence. They have grown together over the centuries and have been unified by the construction of a Parish Church and the appearance of a new 'township' core in the central area. Similarly Żejtun has three component parts, Ta'Fuq (Upper), Ta'Isfel (Lower), and Ta' Wara l-Knisja (Behind the Church): the present large Parish Church has been built in the space remaining between the merging older nuclei. The distinction here is clearly morphological rather than administrative but is nevertheless not to be ignored in a study of social structure and affiliation in a static and conservative community.

[578]

Merging between fully independent villages has also occurred. Balzan-Birkirkara and Pawla-Tarxien are examples, but here the administrative and affiliatory distinctions have been maintained. At a higher level still the merging of the settlements comprising the Urban area, begun in the nineteenth century but more rapid in the twentieth, is the major feature of modern settlement growth in Malta (R/561).

Rabat in Malta, and Rabat (Victoria) in Gozo, illustrate another aspect of settlement evolution where morphological facts bear on social structure. In both cases the 'suburb of the citadel' ('Ir-Rabat tal-Imdina') grew to large-village size outside the Walls of the central fortified stronghold of each Island. In Malta, Rabat remained as the main rural centre after the capital had moved to Valletta, with ancient Mdina itself remaining a quiet residential back-water.

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In Malta the countryman still regards Rabat as an